the weekly Standard

OCTOBER 10, 2005 • $3.95

KAREN OF ARABIA
JONATHAN KARL

SCANDAL SEASON

The long, strange trip of David Safavian—from lobbyist to White House official to criminal defendant

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

PLUS: A beleaguered GOP majority

FRED BARNES • WILLIAM KRISTOL

DAVID SAFAVIAN,
FORMER HEAD OF FEDERAL PROCUREMENT

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Like the price of gasoline now? You'll love the skyrocketing price of phone service after the Bell mega-mergers.

Dear Karl,

The proposed mergers of telephone giants Verizon and SBC with their two largest competitors, MCI and AT&T, are now under government review.

We have just one little request. Let's not rush them through. Please suggest that everyone take the time to study the impact of those mergers thoroughly so they won't create a historic increase in the cost of telephone service to businesses across our land.

The public is not really served by a push for an FCC vote this year – that would only help the phone companies.

Please, take a little more time, find the GIANTS' hidden agendas, and every business in America will benefit.

Thanks, Karl. And, if you could mention this to the boss, we'd sure appreciate that as well.

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Smearing Bill Bennett

There are real scandals in Washington and manufactured ones. The accusation that former Education Secretary William Bennett is a racist falls decidedly into the latter category. A left-wing group that monitors the media statements of its ideological enemies ginned up a lynch mob against Bennett based on a willful misinterpretation of comments about abortion he made to a caller on his radio show Wednesday, September 28. By Friday morning, the mob had gotten results: Congresspersons were calling for Bennett's head on a pike. The Bush White House was distancing itself. The AP wire blared the headline: "Bennett: Black Abortions Would Lower Crime," which was pretty much the polar opposite of what he actually said and believes.

In a nutshell, Bennett argued that those who believe abortion is a grave moral wrong should steer clear of utilitarian arguments, since these can lead to the conclusion that it is acceptable to do evil (e.g., kill unborn black babies) because good might come of it (lower crime rates). Here's the transcript:

CALLER: I noticed the national media, you know, they talk a lot about the loss of revenue, or the inability of the government to fund Social Security, and I was curious, and I've read articles in recent months here, that the abortions that have happened since *Roe* v. *Wade*, the lost revenue from the people who have been aborted in the last 30-something years, could fund Social Security as we know it today. And the media just doesn't—never touches this at all.

BENNETT: Assuming they're all productive citizens?

CALLER: Assuming that they are. Even if only a portion of them were, it would be an enormous amount of revenue.

BENNETT: Maybe, maybe, but we don't know what the costs would be, too. I think as—abortion disproportionately occurs among single women, no?

CALLER: I don't know the exact statistics, but quite a bit are, yeah.

BENNETT: All right, well, I mean, I just don't know. I would not argue for the pro-life position based on this, because you don't know. I mean, it cuts both [ways]. You know, one of the arguments in this book *Freakonomics* that they make is that the declining crime rate, you know, they deal with this hypothesis, that one of the reasons crime is down is that abortion is up. Well—

CALLER: Well, I don't think that statistic is accurate.

BENNETT: Well, I don't think it is either, I don't think it is either, because first of all, there is just too much that you don't know. But I do know that it's true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down. That would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do, but your crime rate would go down. So these far-out, these far-reaching, extensive extrapolations are, I think, tricky.

Okay, it was not Bennett's most articulate moment, but the point is morally weighty: Abortion is a wrong without regard to its effect on crime rates, Social Security solvency, or global warming. The only apologies owed in this case are by Bennett's detractors. ♦

Seeing Pink

First things first. How exactly did University of Iowa adjunct law professor Erin Buzuvis find her way into the middle of an anonymous-death-threats-level controversy over a shade of latex paint called "Dusky Rose"? According to a September 22 entry she posted on Buzwords, her personal blog, it wasn't her fault at all: "KCRG-TV (channel nine) called me today"—not the other way around—because an unnamed "someone told them I had an opinion on the issue." That "issue" being the Iowa athletic department's decades-old practice of decorating its Kinnick Stadium visitors' locker room—walls, shower stalls, carpets, ceilings, urinals, everything—in the aforementioned Dusky Rose color scheme. Otherwise known as "pink."

The Daily Iowan / Rachel Mummey

The offending locker room

And improbably enough, it turned out that KCRG's tipster was right; Erin Buzuvis really had taken the trouble to formulate a specific opinion about pink football lockers. She thought them "sexist and homophobic," because "putting your opponent in a pink locker room is saying 'you are weak like a girl,'" which "implies that girls are nondominant" and "belittles every female athlete out there." And, yes, she was willing to say as much on camera. And, no, she never for a moment imagined that a brief broadcast interview like that could, within the space of 24

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hours, make her the target of statewide ridicule and at least one emailed death threat. But that's what happened.

Ms. Buzuvis, a self-described "NPR-listening," "hockey-playing," "secular, liberal lesbian," has since thought it best to take down her blog. But she remains otherwise undeterred—and vocal. Last week she gave formal testimony before a campus committee reviewing the university's NCAA accreditation; pink paint in the visitors' locker room is a violation of NCAA gender equity rules, Buzuvis told the group. And with university president David Skorton throwing the full weight of his office behind "an open and civilized debate on this issue," the anti-pink-locker-room movement is beginning to gather steam.

Buzuvis's law school faculty colleague Jill Gaulding, for example, has decided she's had enough: "I want the locker room gone." Human brains "pick up stereotypes like sponges soak up water," she points out. And "one solution to reducing stereotypes, especially negative ones, is to not have them around."

Of course, that solution only works if the stereotype in question doesn't already have tenure. ♦

Fruit Salad Inflation

Private Lynndie England, of Fort Ashby, West Virginia, has been convicted of mistreating prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and sentenced to three years in prison.

There is plenty to be said about Abu Ghraib, the case of Private England, and the general subject of the treatment of prisoners in the war on terror. But those are for another day. This week, we confess that our attention was drawn to the photographs of Private England as she entered and left the military courtroom at Fort Hood, Texas. Looking closely, we couldn't help noticing that she wears no less than three rows of ribbons on her dress uniform. The pictures are slightly indistinct, but our cursory examination suggests that this 22-year-old Army Reservist possesses something on the order of eight decorations.

Take a trip to the library, pull an illustrated history of World War II down from the shelves, and count the rows of ribbons on the chests of, say, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower or Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. One or two, perhaps, maybe three? Or better yet, find a picture of Ike as a young second lieutenant, or Nimitz as an ensign, and see if you can find any decorations whatsoever.

It used to be said that the longer standing armies went without actually fighting, the more elaborate, and impractical, their uniforms would grow. Something of the same disease seems to have infected the realm of decorations. Call it medal inflation. The fact that a 22-year-old Reservist, about to be dishonorably discharged and sent to jail, sports a fruit salad on her bosom that would have seemed excessive for a five-star general on V-E Day tells us that self-esteem, at least, is alive and well in today's Army. ♦

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Casual

Fantasy Life

I got an email from my friend Mike Luke last week. His real name is Mike Lukaszewicz and, though he lives in Los Angeles, we stay in touch throughout the year. We correspond almost daily during football season, when the two of us, along with a handful of other friends from Wisconsin, email back and forth to assess the Green Bay Packers. (Or, in the case of my brother Andy, to chastise the coaching staff for failing to call a fake punt or field goal attempt on every fourth down.)

Recently Mike Luke informed the group that he had joined a fantasy football league. Fantasy football works like this: "Owners" choose real NFL players from all 32 squads to create a "team." This usually happens at a beer-drenched draft before the season. The resulting teams then use individual player statistics to compete weekly against one another for stakes that usually amount to little more than pocket change. It's like Dungeons and Dragons for sports nuts. A Harris poll commissioned by the Fantasy Sports Trade Association—yes, there is one—found that nearly 30 million Americans participate in fantasy sports, mostly football.

As he ended one recent email, Mike Luke wrote: "I ended up with a starting squad of Favre, P. Holmes, Tiki Barber, Michael Bennett/Warrick Dunn, Joe Horn, Laveranues Coles, Doug Jolley, Matt Stover, and the colts d. We can start 3 running backs or 3 WRs. Anyway, I'm not sure why you'd care about who's on my team, but now you know."

Mike Luke doesn't know it yet, but needless disclosure of such information is the first sign of Fantasy Football Addiction.

It starts slowly. You tell friends about the fantasy draft or your siblings about who you're starting and who you're keeping on the bench. *It picks up speed.* You tell your parents about your great match-ups this weekend or explain to your wife that Trent Green won't produce the numbers you had anticipated because Kansas City has switched to a run-first offense. *Eventually, it careens out of control.* You tell the grocery checkout lady that Mewelde Moore is going to be a 1,500-yard stud, and you let your boss know how you snookered league-leading "Bridesmaids No Longer" into a trade.

Darren Gygi

Seriously. Here at the office, Vic Matus and Fred Barnes were discussing Fred's upcoming trip to Lambeau Field. When Fred mentioned that he and his son are big fans of Cadillac Williams, I saw my opening.

"Just acquired Cadillac in a blockbuster deal this week," I said, giving them the slow nod that says, "I'm so sweet." Then I paused to heighten the drama. "Traded Jamal Lewis and Donald Driver for Cadillac Williams and Stephen Davis."

No reaction. Maybe it wasn't the steal I had thought. So I threw in this nugget. "Got Steve Smith in the sixth round. The man is a beast."

Nothing. I retreated, head down, to my office. The slow walk was punctuated by sudden, Tourettes-like outbursts. "Stephen Davis—touchdown machine!"

Soon you begin to sound like a local newscaster using nonsensical transitions to force fantasy football into everyday conversations. I was having breakfast with friends, including Buzz Fladung, known in Maryland fantasy circles as the guy who finished 23rd in ESPN's public salary-cap league a few years back. Someone commented, "These eggs are greasy." I turned to Buzz: "Do you think Brian Griese will have any 300-yard games this year?"

Last week, I found myself sitting across from someone I can describe only as a "senior Bush administration official," listening to a perspicacious analysis of the changing dynamics in the Muslim world.

"We are witnessing an awakening of the human spirit, an acknowledgment of the natural rights of individuals, an embrace of government by consent" the official said. "And with Isaac Bruce potentially out with Turf toe against the Giants, you'd better pick up Kevin Curtis when the waiver wire opens Tuesday . . . "

It took me a moment to separate my thoughts from his words. "After the elections in Lebanon," he continued. But I was gone again. "With Pittsburgh's defense on a bye, is the best play Seattle or Denver?"

The lines between fantasy and reality have all but disappeared. As I contemplated a trade with a guy in my league known as "The Manchild," I found myself worried about my team's chemistry. These players don't even know each other.

Anyway, I'm starting Brian Griese, Cadillac Williams, C. Dillon, Steve Smith, and Reggie Wayne at WR, Tony Gonzalez at TE, and S. Graham as my kicker. And I decided to pick up the Seahawks for my DST, against a weak Washington Redskins offense.

I'm not sure why you'd care about who's on my team, but now you know.

Stephen F. Hayes

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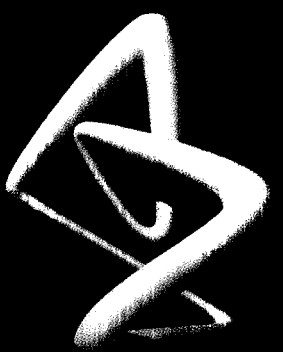
What does this stand for?



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Worth a Do-Over?

I COULD NOT DISAGREE MORE with James R. Stoner Jr.'s "Saving a Great City" (Sept. 26). Considering the huge mistake being made now in rebuilding the World Trade Center to a new ridiculous altitude, New Orleans should, at best, be rebuilt as a much smaller version of what it was, and the rest left as a reminder to Americans of the supreme force of God (or "nature"). If the city is to be rebuilt, though, it should be done completely without federal taxpayer dollars; let the state of Louisiana fund the reconstruction if they so choose.

MIKE GRANGER
Longmont, CO

Rebuilding Wisely

REGARDING Irwin M. Stelzer's "Katrina Conservatism" (Sept. 26): It is fascinating that the people of New Orleans (the local government included) think it inappropriate for the federal government to advise them as to what may or may not be a safe place to build or rebuild.

In my town there are all sorts of safety regulations with which both public and private structures must comply. My front hall closet has a light that will never be connected, because the town says we cannot have a light and a shelf under that light as it is a fire hazard. Should not development be restricted in portions of New Orleans that pose a flood hazard?

Perhaps the federal government, as a part of its Katrina relief efforts, ought to begin to reserve the right to say where it is appropriate to rebuild.

AARON H. FRANK
West Hartford, CT

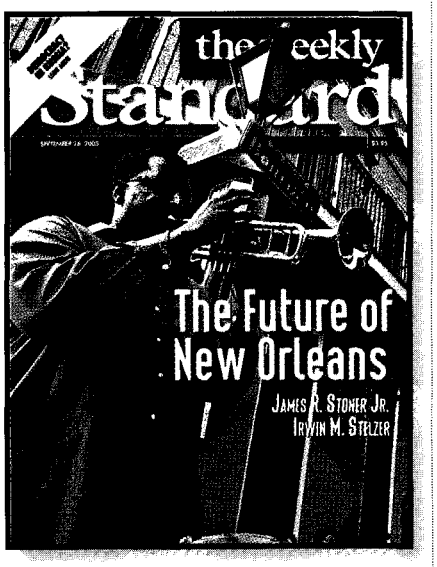
Twain on Joan

ERIC J. SUNDQUIST's review of *Mark Twain: A Life* (Sept. 19) was thoroughly enjoyable. Unfortunately, Sundquist, like many reviewers, completely ignores Twain's *Joan of Arc*, which Twain himself praised as "the best of all my books." It is the great exception to what Sundquist calls "his lifelong defiance of most every conventional belief." It is a beautiful and profoundly religious book with no trace of Twain's characteristic sarcasm. Perhaps deep down in him ran a small river of reverence. He just needed a proper subject.

PATRICIA KUSHINER
Chicago, IL

First Responder

I AM SURPRISED that Fred Barnes suggests that President Bush "stumbled for a day



or two" after 9/11 ("The Politics of Katrina," Sept. 19), thereby committing the same error as the Democrats who jumped on the president's back before he could get his breath. Bush needed to take a good look at what happened in order to make a wise decision about what to do first.

I have actually heard people say that he was "running scared" by jumping into Air Force One and skittering off to the Wild West to protect himself. Could any statement be more ridiculous? But that's what the lefties continue to tell us.

ALBERTA ZIMMERMAN
Granger, IN

Roberts's Ruses

ONE THING Terry Eastland left out of "Chief Justice Roberts" (Sept. 26) is that when Roberts was asked if he saw any limits to what could be legislated, he agreed that Congress could legislate whatever they wanted. What he did not say, and what I hope he was thinking, was that Congress can legislate anything they want—and then the president can sign or veto, and the Court can uphold or strike down.

A case in point is campaign finance reform, which violates almost any interpretation of the First Amendment. Congress legislated it, the president signed it, and the Court, ignoring the First Amendment, upheld much of it (regardless of the fact that the First Amendment states that "Congress shall make *no* law . . . ").

This illustrates how Congress can make whatever law it wants, regardless of how constitutional that law may be. After craftily making it through the hearings, Roberts, I hope, will be a restraining voice.

JAMES H. WARD
Elgin, IL

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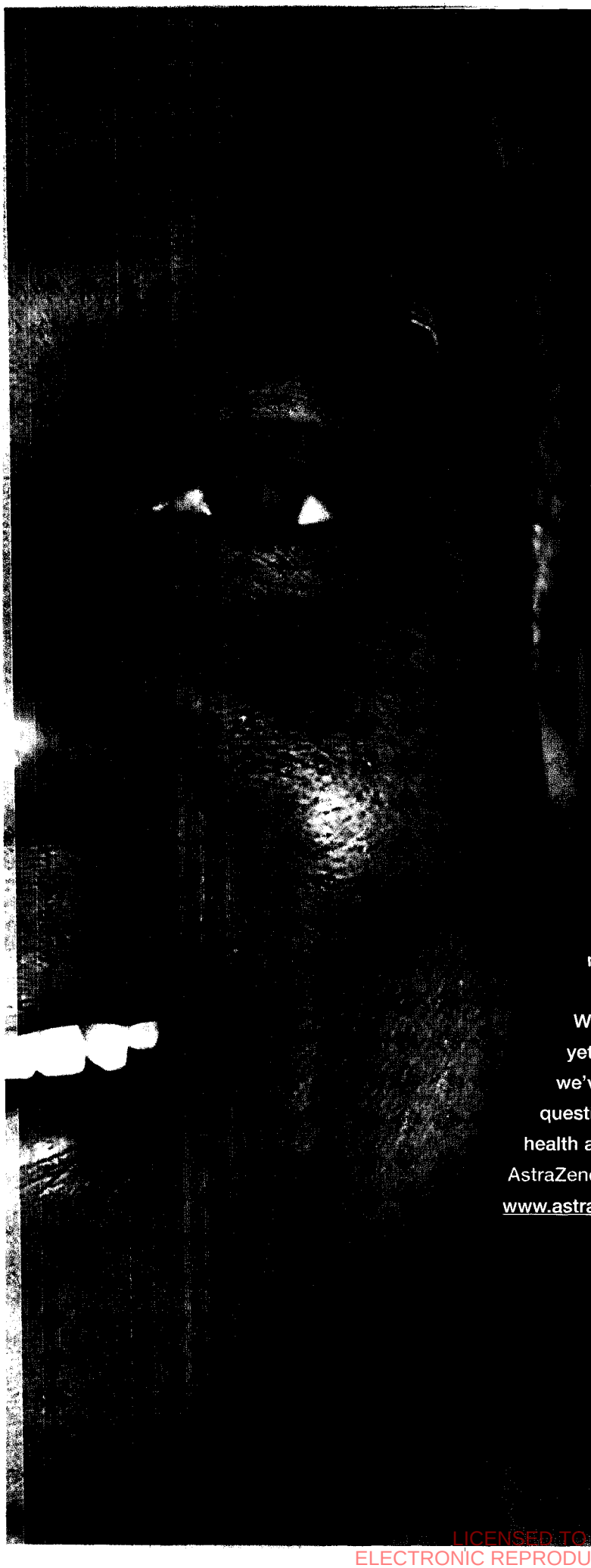

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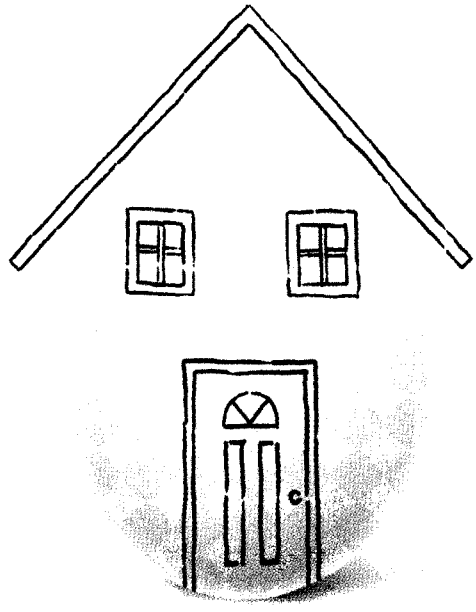

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Policy Trumps Scandal

A week ago we suggested in this space that a beleaguered President Bush was "poised to rebound by getting back to basics, and getting back to a core, winning agenda." Sure enough, *USA Today* reported a week later that Bush's poll ratings had rebounded to 45 percent approval/50 percent disapproval from a low earlier in the month of 40 percent approval/58 percent disapproval.

I know, I know. Correlation is not causation. It is a fallacy to claim *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. And so forth. THE WEEKLY STANDARD won't try to take credit for the president's 5-point bounce. Still, it is startling that during a period in which headlines featured the stock sale of GOP Senate leader Bill Frist, the indictment of GOP House leader Tom DeLay, the CIA-leak testimony of Judith Miller, and the arrest by the FBI of Jack Abramoff-Grover Norquist associate and White House official David Safavian, the president seems to have done fine. What lessons are to be drawn from that?

Not, we hasten to add, that sleaze is good. It isn't. Not that there aren't real problems with the ethics and the policies of some of those associated with the Republican majorities on the Hill or the Bush administration. There are. And not that Republicans and conservatives shouldn't be worried about the reality, and the perception, of a "culture of corruption." They should be.

But the poll numbers do remind us that while "corruption" matters, it doesn't necessarily trump all. The media love scandal stories, but citizens put them in perspective. The citizenry tends to reserve judgment on charges and accusations about which they don't yet know all or even most of the facts. Sensible people don't leap to generalize from a few cases about a whole administration or an entire political party. And they tend to care more about substantive policies and real-world results than they do about alleged sleaze or even corruption. As John J. DiIulio Jr. put it (in a somewhat different context) in his contribution to our tenth anniversary symposium, "policy matters most."

What about the 1994 Republican electoral victory? Wasn't that campaign, which resulted in the biggest electoral swing in a generation, about the corruption of the Democratic Congress? Actually, no. Jim Wright and Tony Coelho were forced to resign in 1989—and had been long replaced and forgotten by 1994. The House banking scandal broke in 1991, and was an issue in the 1992 elections—but not 1994.

In fact, the 1994 campaign was about policy—and ideology. It was about replacing big government liberalism with a conservatism reformist in its policies and traditional in its values. It was about the failed Clinton health care plan, the tax hikes, and gun control measures passed by the Democratic Congress over GOP opposition, about Clinton/Democratic moments like gays in the military and Joycelyn Elders on sex and Lani Guinier on race, about fecklessness abroad in Somalia and Haiti. The 1994 campaign was the most ideological in the last two decades. The next most ideological, in fact, was probably 2004.

And in both of these campaigns Republicans did well. Guess what? There is a natural more-or-less conservative majority in the country for economic growth/strength abroad/socially conservative policies, and, conversely, there is quite a lot of hostility to liberal activist judges, high taxes, and American weakness. Obviously, elected officials should pursue the policies they think right, regardless of possible electoral implications in the future—and, even more obviously, regardless of week-to-week poll results. But insofar as electoral considerations can't help but intrude, the president and Republicans should take heart. Bush rebounded, despite the "culture of corruption" story line being pushed by the Democrats and the media, over the last ten days. He did so because of the John Roberts debate and victory, because of sound and energetic leadership of the executive branch vis-à-vis hurricane Rita, and in a climate of repeated expressions of determination to stay the course in Iraq, as well as because of some openness to GOP congressional calls for spending restraint and for extending the tax cuts.

The next three months will be key for Iraq, important for budget and tax policy, and crucial to the future of constitutional law. If the Bush administration gets those right and doesn't lose its nerve, all the rest shouldn't matter too much.

—*William Kristol*

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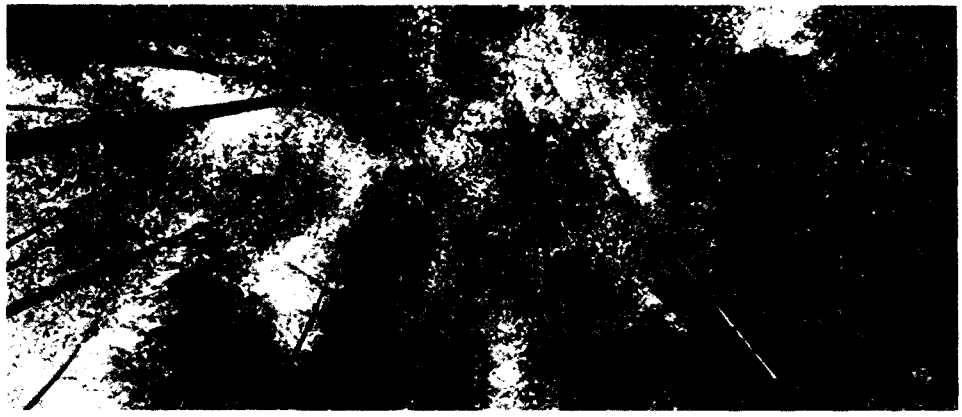

The value of seeing the whole forest.

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After the Hammer, a Blunt Force

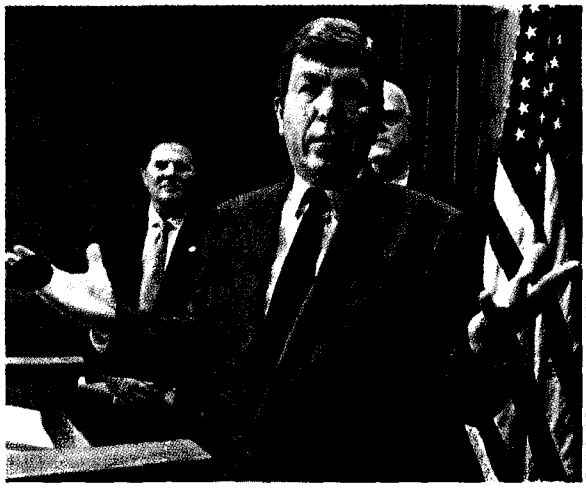
The White House will miss Tom DeLay more than you think. BY FRED BARNES

WITH TOM DELAY on the sidelines, things will be different on Capitol Hill, especially for President Bush. The White House will no longer command an automatic majority in the House of Representatives—that is, the votes of nearly all 231 Republicans—on any bill the president endorses. In the shuffle that saw DeLay replaced as majority leader by Roy Blunt, Bush came out a loser.

This is counterintuitive because the Missouri Republican has a warmer relationship with the White House, particularly with deputy chief of staff Karl Rove, than DeLay ever did. Blunt's close ties with the president go back to 1999, when he was a member of Bush's presidential exploratory committee. DeLay's relationship with Bush has been less friendly, even distant at times, though both are Texas conservatives. But despite the White House's lack of appreciation for DeLay, he has been Bush's most important ally in Congress for the past five years.

DeLay's absence means the House will probably not vote this fall on the president's plan for Social Security reform—or even take it up. Bush wants the House to consider his plan, and DeLay had intended to put it on the schedule. But Blunt isn't likely to. On Katrina recovery, spending cuts, and immigration reform, DeLay would probably have pursued Bush's wishes. Blunt is more inclined to champion the preference of House Republicans on these issues. And they disagree sharply with the White House.

As you might expect, DeLay and Blunt have contrasting views of the role of majority leader. DeLay is a risk-taker who, like Bush, prefers a long-term approach. He believes the House should vote on issues that may not reach final enactment for years, if ever. Social Security reform is one example. DeLay's strategy is to use House approval to stir public approval and to prod the less conservative Senate to act.



Roll Call Photos / Tom Williams

Roy Blunt, the new majority leader

Blunt is more cautious. For now anyway, his top priority is to protect House Republicans against losing their seats in next year's midterm election, which looks to be a perilous one for Republicans. He doesn't want to require a vote on Social Security reform when there's no chance the Senate will bring it up, much less pass it. In Blunt's view, House Republicans would be "left out to dry" on an issue that could harm their prospects for reelection.

On spending cuts to offset Katrina relief, DeLay's initial impulse was to say those couldn't be achieved. This was in line with White House thinking. But with both conservative and moderate Republicans in the House demanding offsets, Blunt won't stand in their way. "We're not talking about whether to cut spending," says Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, "but how much."

A Republican plan favored by conservatives and moderates alike would appropriate $50 billion on top of the $62 billion that's already been approved for Katrina relief. The $50 billion would be nearly offset by cuts already advocated by the White House, plus a 2 percent across-the-board spending reduction in nonmilitary federal programs. Blunt has privately spoken favorably of this plan. This would preclude a separate anti-poverty program in the Gulf region the White House is currently considering.

As a Republican leader, DeLay has been almost totally mischaracterized by the press. The nickname given DeLay by his political opponents—The Hammer—has been used in the media to reinforce his image as a no-holds-barred brute who pressures House Republicans to follow his lead. In truth, his value as a leader comes from his skills as a motivator and cheerleader and as a strategist. A moderate House Republican calls DeLay "our big political thinker."

Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana, leader of the 100-plus-member Republican Study Committee in the House, says of DeLay's resignation as majority leader: "The only thing it changes is everything. He wasn't our Robert E. Lee, but he was our Stonewall Jackson." Lee described Jackson as indispensable, not just his right hand but his right arm.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD. *His book on President Bush,* Rebel-in-Chief, *will be published in January by Crown Forum.*

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Notice Pence refers to DeLay in the past tense. It's quite possible DeLay will never return as majority leader, even if cleared of the charge against him. The first blow to his potential comeback came when House Republicans balked at the plan for Rep. David Dreier of California, the chairman of the Rules Committee, to join Blunt as co-temporary majority leader. This scheme had been worked out by DeLay and Speaker Denny Hastert, according to Republican members. By splitting the job, they would have made it easier for DeLay to resume majority leader duties once his case was resolved.

Most House Republicans learned of this plan from news reports on September 28, the day DeLay was indicted and stepped aside as majority leader. Both conservatives and moderates rebelled. Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois, leader of the 35-member Wednesday Group of Republican moderates, met with Hastert at midday and urged the speaker to drop the Dreier plan. He said the chain of command should be followed, with the first sergeant (Blunt) succeeding the wounded lieutenant (DeLay). By the time Pence showed up for a meeting with Hastert two hours later, the speaker had jettisoned Dreier. Before Pence could utter a word, Hastert told him that Blunt alone would be the majority leader.

The biggest threat to DeLay's return is a formal election of a new majority leader. That would come in January if 50 members sign a petition asking for an election. Chances are, 50 will and Blunt will be elected. He'd no longer be a temporary appointee of Hastert. DeLay would be out, no matter what happened in his criminal case.

Unheralded by the media, Bush has managed some real successes in his second term, winning congressional approval of bankruptcy reform, curbs on class-action lawsuits, an energy bill, a transportation bill, and the Central American Free Trade Agreement. Katrina was a bump in the road for him. So is DeLay's exit. ♦

Karen of Arabia

I, Mom meets the imams.

BY JONATHAN KARL

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

WHEN KAREN HUGHES'S motorcade pulled up to Dar Al-Hekma women's college in Jeddah, there was one pressing question for the reporters traveling with her: Would we be allowed inside?

America's new public diplomacy czar had arrived to hold a town hall meeting with about 500 Saudi women. Unlike the more controlled events with "opinion leaders," this had the potential for real unpredictability. When had any group of women in Saudi Arabia been invited to question a senior U.S. official?

Unfortunately, half of the reporters traveling with Hughes were men. Bringing us into the auditorium would be a violation of Saudi Arabia's strict segregation of men and women in public places. At first we were shuttled to a separate room and told we would have to watch the event on closed-circuit television. After just a few minutes, there was a surprise announcement: All the reporters, men included, would be allowed into the auditorium. U.S. Embassy officials couldn't believe it. One called it "historic." Men and women together in public. A shocking thought in the Saudi world. Gamal Helal, a longtime Arabic interpreter and adviser to Democratic and Republican presidents, told Hughes it was "a Rosa Parks moment." Maybe not quite "Rosa Parks," but Saudi reform advocates say the recently crowned King Abdullah is serious about reform, and this could be an indication they are right.

We walked in to see 500 Saudi women, all covered in abayas, a sea of black except for a handful of white head scarves. The traveling press, however, would be segregated by sex: The women in our group were instructed to sit on the right side of the auditorium, the men on the left. Cameras were not permitted.

Hughes was only two days into her five-day "listening tour" of the Middle East, and she was relentlessly "on message." Her unshakable discipline in sticking to the script has a mind-numbing effect when you watch her through several events a day.

"I go as an official of the U.S. government, but I'm also a mom, a working mom," she told reporters on the flight from Washington to Cairo.

To college students in Cairo: "You've heard my title, but that's the fancy stuff. I am really a mom."

"My most important job is mom," she said in an interview with NBC News. "I still have to pinch myself a little when I am sitting in a meeting with the king [of Saudi Arabia] and realize that I'm there representing our country."

At a joint press conference in Turkey: "I am a mom, and I love kids. I love all kids. And I understand that is something I have in common with the Turkish people."

That's right, the Turkish people love kids.

Even when she talked about Muslim religious leaders, instead of saying "Imam," she would say, "I-mom." All this "I-mom" diplomacy left some people a bit mystified. When it came time for a photo op with the Saudi information minister, the TV cameras picked up this exchange:

Saudi information minister: "Tell me what you are seeking to hear—"

Hughes (interjecting): "I'm really here to listen."

Saudi minister: "I'm not sure what it is."

Jonathan Karl is senior foreign affairs correspondent for ABC News.

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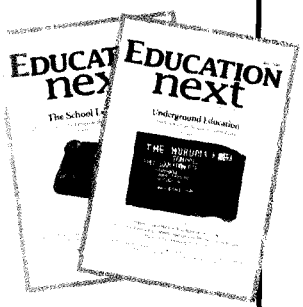

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Among the "top-[illegible]" top 10 percent of test-takers, reading scores have dropped four points since 1971 and math scores have not budged since first measured in 1978. So say the latest (2004) results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card.

At the other end of the scale, dropout rates have actually increased since 1990, rising to 30 percent of all seventeen-year-olds. Among African Americans the dropout rate is running somewhere between 50 and 60 percent, a sad fact that remains one of the best-kept secrets in American education. Because few people know the facts, in a recently issued book, Michael Dyson scolds Bill Cosby for (accurately) lamenting the fact that only about half of African Americans graduate from high school. Dyson "corrected" him, saying the dropout rate is only 17 percent, an inaccuracy that earned Dyson warm praise from a *New York Times* book reviewer.

The reviewer's error only shows how successful the public education cartel has been in misleading the public. To hide actual dropout rates, most school districts report as dropouts only those who entered the year as seniors but did not remain in school until the end of that year. All other dropouts over the preceding three years—and all the summers in between, when most dropping out actually occurs—are statistically ignored.

The U.S. Department of Education has long been complicit in fostering that misperception. To [illegible] head of the Department's Institute of Education Sciences is now actively working to remedy the situation, as are the nation's governors, who are now embarked on a Herculean effort to develop a multistate common definition and gauge of high school completion.

Getting the facts right will be a start. But we then need to do something about it.

We currently base our high school policies on two contradictory assumptions: (1)that adolescents are responsible enough that they can choose their own curriculum from the shopping mall of choices available;(2) that adolescents should not be held responsible for their performances. Testing expectations should be minimal, and graduation requirements should be easily achievable.

No wonder the United States is desperately searching for ways to import talent from abroad. If we are to regain our educational strength in a world where other nations are passing us by, we need to hold students responsible for more than just selecting the courses they want to take. To graduate from high school, students should be expected to pass, at as high a level as they can, a challenging, substantive examination in a variety of subjects that allow them to demonstrate—to colleges and employers—just how accomplished they are. The Advanced Placement Test is a good beginning, but until more than 9 percent of all public school students take that test, it will not have a broad impact.

—Paul E. Peterson

Paul Peterson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. Peterson is also the editor in chief of Education Next *and the director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University.*

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The event at the women's college in Saudi Arabia started like all the others. "My most important title is that of mom," Hughes told the women, many watching from behind their veils. But things were about to get interesting.

"I know here in Saudi Arabia, you had municipal elections earlier this year," she said. The elections were the first in Saudi history, but women were not allowed to vote.

"We certainly hope and encourage—again we don't want to impose—that women will be allowed not only to vote but to perhaps run for office, and we look forward to the day when women will be able to fully participate in Saudi society."

When it came time for questions from the women, two things became clear: (1) These students didn't find Karen Hughes's status as a mom particularly relevant; and (2) they resented being portrayed as victims.

Student after student stepped to the microphones in the hall. Peering out from behind their abayas, they denounced the portrayal in the American news media of Saudi women as powerless and abused.

"We are not oppressed. We are not prisoners in our own homes," said one student. "We are all pretty happy." She demanded to know why Americans have such a negative view of the way Saudi women are treated.

With this Hughes saw an opening and, for the first time on her trip, went into completely uncharted territory.

One reason Americans feel that way about the treatment of Saudi women, Hughes said, is the ban on women driving. And here she went significantly further than her boss, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. During her own recent trip to Saudi Arabia, Rice specifically declined to criticize the ban on women driving. In contrast, Hughes took on the Saudi ban on women driving and did so in a nuanced, even artful, way.

"I believe women should be full and equal participants in society," she said. "And I feel as an American woman that my ability to drive is an important part of my freedom. It has allowed me to work during my career, it has allowed me to go to the grocery store and shop for my family, it allows me to go to the doctor. It gives me a measure, an important measure, of independence," Hughes said.

Reuters / Landov

The listening tour: Karen Hughes meets the chief rabbi in Turkey.

"Now I understand that your culture and traditions here in Saudi Arabia are very different," she continued. "So I don't think we should try to impose from outside an outcome for you all. But I do think we can encourage greater participation, encourage opportunities like this for women in Saudi Arabia to speak up and speak your minds."

Her point was simple: Saudi women should have a say in whether or not they are allowed to drive or vote.

Hughes later told reporters that as she was leaving the auditorium, "more than five women came up to me and said, I'm so glad you said that. They whispered it very quietly." Another U.S. official at the meeting said one of the teachers told her she planned to discreetly start teaching students to drive next year.

After the meeting was over, I waded into the crowd and started talking to the women, who weren't even supposed to be in the same room as me. Dismayed school officials watched as other reporters, men and women, started doing the same thing.

The women were eager to talk, almost all of them insisting that Americans are all wrong about Saudi Arabia and the role of Saudi women. Soon, however, it became clear that these women, for the most part, are convinced their country is changing.

"Besides driving, name one way we don't have equal rights," said a student named Aram.

"Can you travel without permission of a male relative?" I asked.

"No. But we still travel."

"Do your brothers need permission?"

"No! But, of course, they tell their parents where they are going."

"Can you vote?"

"No. But we've only had one election so far. And I think I read that women and blacks in America weren't able to vote for a long time."

Many of them defended the driving ban. They like being driven around, they insisted. Although one woman in the audience told the *Washington Post*'s Glenn Kessler, "We are very happy and satisfied, but we

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would be happier and more satisfied if we could drive."

At first I was mystified that such intelligent, highly educated, ambitious women would be defending a system that denies them equal rights, but I soon realized that's not what they were doing at all. What they were doing was taking issue with the portrayal of them as powerless victims. They were also expressing a confidence that their society is changing. If there hadn't been school officials within earshot, they would probably have been even more direct in talking about the need for change, but the point came through anyway.

"What do you want to be 10 years from now?" I asked several of the students.

"Lawyer," said one.

"Banker."

"Ambassador," said Aram, the woman student who had been most aggressively refuting the notion that Saudi women don't have everything they want.

"Ambassador?" I asked. "Does Saudi Arabia have any women ambassadors, anywhere in the world?"

"No," she said. But Aram, who just a few minutes earlier had defended the fact that her country did not allow women to vote, told me she is convinced that her country is changing so much that Saudi Arabia will soon have women ambassadors.

Virtually all of the students wore fashionable western garb visible under their abayas. As I was talking to one of the students, her headscarf started to slip, eventually falling completely off. A school staffer came over to join the conversation, putting herself between me and the student. By the time the reporters were ushered out of the room, I noticed three women had let their headscarves fall off. That may not be a big deal anywhere else, but in Saudi Arabia it's a radical statement.

As I left the auditorium, I asked several students if I could email them. I was surprised by their addresses: "sweeteyes," "cuteygirl85," "blackrose," etc. There's something going on in Saudi Arabia. ♦

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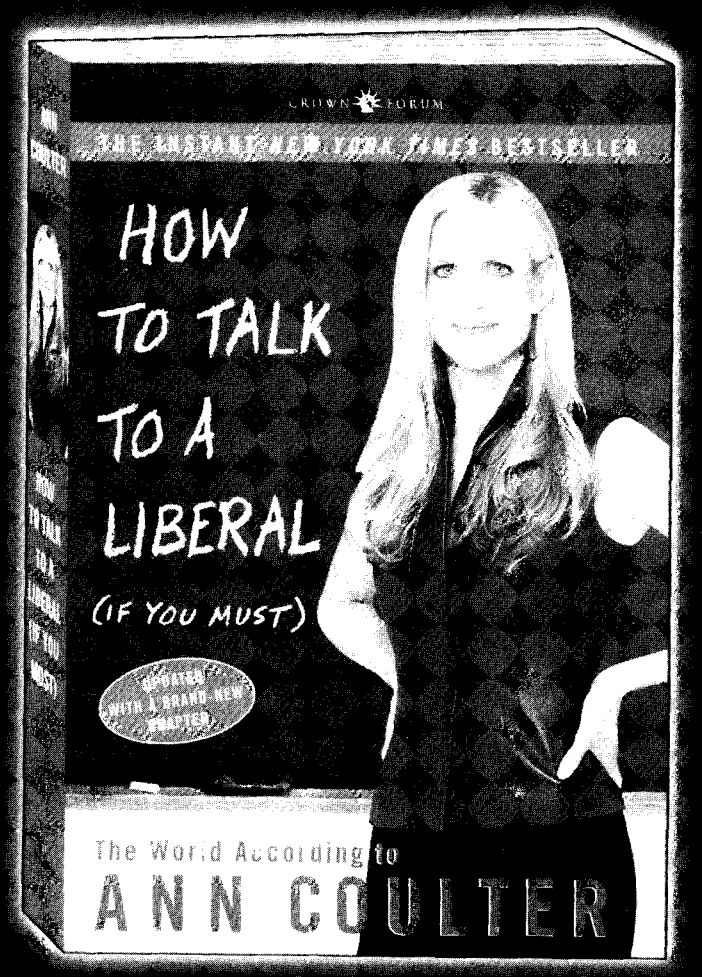

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Two, Three, Many Katrinas

Rita disappoints the liberals.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

CHIEF AMONG the marvelous qualities of liberalism is its ability to see the good in human suffering—and make a good thing of it. How like the early Christians, if the early Christians had been in politics. Hurricane Katrina was a blessing to liberals, a consecrated opportunity to make advocates of small government look small, to enlarge largess with a public dole of private goods, to expand the elemental purview of politics to include earth, water, air, and (with gas at $3) fire, and to shrink the reputation of a despised president. Hurricane Rita, with its sensible actions by state and city officials, orderly evacuations, lack of looting and minimal loss of life, was not a blessing. One's heart went out to liberals, watching their disappointment as Rita failed to destroy Galveston, flood Houston, or wipe Crawford off the map. How can liberals make sure that America never experiences another Rita?

Onward and upward is the maxim of the politically progressive. Liberals need to go straight to the top if they want more Katrina disasters. Where conservatives perceive only molehills of individual responsibility, liberals can make mountains of government accountability. Disasters are fostered by moving the responsibility for things up and away, as far from the things themselves as possible. Look what the Soviet Union's Himalaya of a government was able to do with atomic power at Chernobyl.

P.J. O'Rourke is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD *and author, most recently, of* Peace Kills *(Atlantic Monthly Press).*

To elevate government, add layers of bureaucracy. Bush's creation of the Department of Homeland Security helped ensure FEMA's high-altitude performance—cold, remote, and oxygen-deprived. But FEMA, it must be proudly remembered, was a brainchild of the Carter administration.

The lowly, distant concept of private property ought to be ignored. Recent decisions have made the Supreme Court's position on property rights clear, and liberals need fear no judicial opposition on this point. But what if the New Orleans levees had been owned by the people whose property the levees protected? Rather than supplying proven reserves of liberal outrage, New Orleans would have been a dry hole. What if the New Orleans taxpayers, instead of the nation's taxpayers, had borne the expense of those levees? There would have been no difficulty getting people from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. They would have been there already. And making flood insurance a federal program was a brilliant stroke. That way homeowners didn't apply for it, since federal government services arrive whether requested or not—the Internal Revenue Service, for example.

Speaking of where tax dollars go, criminals and thugs played an important role in the Katrina debacle. Liberals must continue to build a lively and energetic underclass. Fortunately, in New Orleans, welfare reform wasn't working well—people were still on welfare. But the Republican gutting of the welfare system may be causing a dire loss of lumpen proletariat elsewhere in the country. It behooves liberals to remember that the political is the personal. The underclass can be nurtured by encouraging people to lead dissolute personal lives. Those who are too busy balancing the demands of career and child care can give attention and approbation to the dissolute lives of others. Be sure to buy *Vanity Fair*.

Is the woeful contraction of the underclass to blame for America's precipitous decline in municipal corruption? New Orleans, as Katrina made clear, has escaped this trend, but its effects are painfully evident in New York, Washington, even Baltimore. No really serious long-term effects from a natural disaster can be expected without local wire-pulling, jobbery, and graft. Maybe this is an issue on which liberals can make bipartisan efforts. Supporting a stricter immigration policy would deter the incursions of ambitious, entrepreneurial types into inner cities. Strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act could give middle class urban dwellers better information on public school failures to hasten their exodus to the suburbs. And tougher drug laws might increase drug-dealing profits and the influence of organized crime in municipal affairs.

On a more activist front, it is vital that liberals build their support base in places most prone to the effects of natural disasters, especially in those places where the population is incapable of taking care of itself. The location of Hollywood on a major earthquake fault is an example of this kind of planning at its best. (Note that America's Founders positioned the U.S. capital on a malarial flood plain.) A further possibility would be to move Howard Dean, Al Sharpton, Michael Moore, Hillary Clinton, the headquarters of MoveOn.org, and the principal contributors to EMILY's List into house trailers in Kansas during tornado season.

But bad weather cannot be left simply to do the job on its own. The Sierra Club, Earth First! and other ecology-minded groups have proven it's not true that "everybody talks about the weather but nobody does any-

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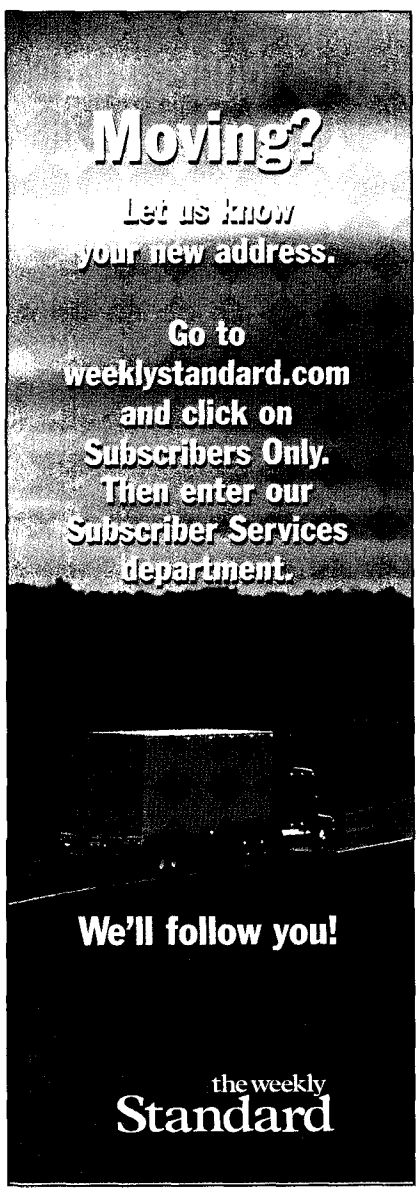
thing about it." Global warming is a fact. Now it's up to liberals to make it a reality. Hence there is crucial importance in preventing powerful, greedy free market forces from getting in the way of worsening storms and rising sea levels. The Kyoto Accord is a good first step.

If liberals organize and work together to increase public awareness and help voters grow as persons, America can be assured of many future edifying spectacles such as that seen in New Orleans. People were stuck in the mire, they lost everything, they drowned, but liberals took the high ground. ♦



Labour's Pain . . .

And Blair's achievement.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Brighton

THE LABOUR PARTY'S activist delegates descended on this channelside town for their first annual conference since Tony Blair led them to their unprecedented third straight electoral triumph in May. In the great tradition of the party, its leaders found a bastion of privilege to assault, but a bastion that only a few short years ago they would have chosen to strengthen rather than weaken—the trade unions.

Gone are the days when the unions dictated policy to the parliamentary Labour party. Led by Blair, the government refused to accede to the unions' demands that Margaret Thatcher's laws prohibiting sympathy strikes ("solidarity actions," in the union jargon) be repealed, and that other measures to make it easier for the trade unions to disrupt the economy be adopted. Both the prime minister and Gordon Brown, chancellor and successor-in-waiting (and waiting and waiting, with mounting annoyance) told the unions that there is no turning back from the labor-market reforms that have allowed Britain to maintain one of the most successful economies in Europe. "Not for us the malaise of France or the angst of Germany," Blair, now serving as president of the European Union but apparently unafraid to antagonize two of its largest members, told an appreciative audience.

As in other matters, so with the unions—the prime minister was taking a risky stand to prevent the unions from regaining their historic stranglehold on the economy, and from scuppering his plans to reform the public services. After all, the trade unions still control about half the votes at party conferences, and provide the Labour party with about 40 percent of its funds and the majority of the foot soldiers it needs for the door-to-door canvassing that is so crucial in a country in which campaign spending and television advertising are strictly limited.

To students of social democratic history in Europe, this was only one of several striking changes from the days when Labour nationalized the coal, steel, airline, oil, and other industries in an effort to control the commanding heights of the economy. Blair told the delegates that he would continue reforming the public services so that parents can choose from a menu of specialized schools the one best suited to the needs of their children, and would "break down the old monolith" that is the state-operated National Health Service and "bring in new providers, allow patients choice" of doctors and hospitals.

True, he plans to confine choice to public-sector schools. But the very idea of choice is radical stuff in Britain where the consumer has not in the past been considered king. So Blair poured this New Labour wine from some Old Labour bottles. "If you've the money, you buy better [education and health care]. That is an affront to every progressive value we believe in. . . . Choice is what wealthy people have exercised for centuries. . . . Choice is too important to be a monopoly of the wealthy." The delegates loved this call to egalitarianism; the trade unions, representing workers in the

Irwin M. Stelzer is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, and a columnist for the* Sunday Times *(London).*

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health service and the schools, hated it. Choice would mean the closing of badly performing schools, and allowing patients to make appointments at times of their convenience, rather than sitting for hours in waiting rooms while hospital staff read the days' sports and gossip columns, or try to cope with the paperwork that is the inevitable consequence of central control of a workforce as large as the Chinese army.

So I was watching the most successful leader of a left-of-center party in Europe promising his members that he would fight for flexible labor markets and consumer choice. True, the labor market will remain burdened with procedures that make it more difficult to discharge employees than it is in the United States, and with the costs of such schemes as extended paternal leave and what Blair called "a new frontier of the welfare state, affordable, wraparound child care between the hours of 8 A.M. and 6 P.M. for all who need it." But in pre-Blair days these reforms weren't even on the table; now they are part of the platform of the Labour party. The rest of Europe, with twice the unemployment levels of Great Britain, is beginning to concede that Blair, who styled himself a "change-maker," may be on to something.

It took some courage for Blair to promise a new, modern welfare state that has as its primary goal catering to the users of the public services rather than to the unionized providers of those services. After all, many of the delegates continue to address each other as "comrades," loyally clutch their copies of the *Guardian*, and cluck approvingly at that left-wing paper's assault on the prime minister for what they see as his abandonment of his party's values. The sponsored booths surrounding the convention hall included those of the "Cuba Solidarity Campaign," signing people up for tours to "provide solidarity and support for the Cuban people." And an Anti-Apathy group announced that it had sold out its supply of trainers (sneakers, to us) made from recycled textiles. (The "Escape" line of sneakers is recycled from such items as prison blankets; the "Jack" line from "pre-loved men's suits.")

But when it came to the domestic front, Blair was engaging in a mopping-up operation in a war he has won—with some setbacks, and not completely—after eight years in office. His real profile in courage came when discussing Iraq and Britain's relations with America.

One high-level Blairite told me that 80 percent of the delegates, and of the party, oppose Britain's continued participation in the war in Iraq, and their opposition had contributed to the reduction of Labour's parliamentary majority in the recent election. Blair acknowledged this opposition: "I know there are people, good people, who disagreed with the decision to remove Saddam by force." And he concedes that "as a result of the fighting, innocent people tragically die."

One high-level Blairite told me that 80 percent of the delegates, and of the party, oppose Britain's continued participation in the war in Iraq.

But then came three sentences, each of which was followed by applause that, if it cannot be called wild, was more than polite:

> But 8 and a half million Iraqis showed which future they wanted when they came out and voted in January's elections.
>
> And the way to stop the innocent dying is not to retreat, to withdraw, to hand these people over to the mercy of religious fanatics or relics of Saddam, but to stand up for their right to decide their government in the same democratic way the British people do. . . .
>
> Strip away their fake claims of grievance and see them for what they are: terrorists who use 21st century technology to fight a pre-medieval religious war that is utterly alien to the future of mankind.

In short, the prime minister used the communication skills with which Americans became familiar during his visits to New York, Washington, Camp David, and Crawford to persuade a skeptical audience that the British people, proud of their historic opposition to tyranny, are again living in an age in which Britain must "fight behind the standard of democracy," whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, or Sierra Leone. "For all the pain it can bring," he said, Britain must be at the front in that battle for democracy. That is the "progressive cause."

It was when Blair turned to the defense of his partnership with America that the delegates sat on their hands. It is difficult to do justice to the speech by paraphrasing, so permit me a slightly extended direct quotation:

> Britain should . . . remain the strongest ally of the United States. I know there's a bit of us that would like me to do a Hugh Grant in *Love Actually* and tell America where to get off. But the difference between a good film and real life is that in real life there's the next day, the next year, the next lifetime to contemplate the ruinous consequences of easy applause. I never doubted after September 11th that our place was alongside America and I don't doubt it now. And for a very simple reason. Terrorism struck most dramatically in New York but it was aimed then, and is aimed now, at us all, at our way of life. This is a global struggle.

After the delegates had left the hall I chatted with a former minister in the Blair government and pointed out that the delegates had cheered when the prime minister urged them to "remain strong partners in Europe"—you know, the Europe

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Blair had mocked a few minutes earlier for suffering from "malaise" and "angst"—but when he called upon them to support him in remaining America's strongest ally, the silence was deafening. "Don't be so gloomy," he responded, "they didn't boo." Thank Blair for small favors. And for his willingness to attempt, once again, to convince an audience, made skeptical by its opposition to Iraq and its fear and loathing of George W. Bush, of the importance of the U.S.-U.K. special relationship.

I have attended every annual conference since Blair took control of the Labour party. I have watched him face down the party's vocal and powerful left and shed the famous and beloved Clause IV of his party's constitution, drafted by Sidney Webb in 1918 and pledging "to secure for the workers by hand or by brain . . . the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange." I have seen him develop and lay out the doctrines of preemption, intervention, and regime change in the case of genocidal regimes, while Bush was still governor of Texas and the neoconservatives mere out-of-power scribblers. And I have seen him leave a trade union conference in mid-session and head directly for the United States after September 11, and then stand with President Bush in a coalition of the willing when France and an anti-American, Saddam-purchased clique paralyzed the United Nations.

And last week I saw him once again defy his party and much of the electorate to reiterate his resolve to stay with us in waging war on terrorism, in the firm belief that helping to spread democracy is what he likes to call "the right thing," and that the spread of democracy is our ultimate defense against Islamic terrorism. That's what he told his party last week, as they gathered on the shores of the Channel, across which some of them, and some of their parents, had traveled to unseat another tyrant who threatened their way of life. ♦

Revenge of the Rugrats

A new generation weighs in on divorce.

BY MARY EBERSTADT

JUDGING BY LETTERS to the editor and furious Internet circulation, the *New York Times* struck a collective nerve the other week with its front-page story announcing that "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood." According to the article, surveys of 138 female students at Yale revealed that roughly 60 percent planned to cut back or stop work when they had children. Scattered interviews at other high-end schools confirmed that many of today's young women do not dream of supercharged 12-hour days at the future office, at least not when their children are young. And though hardly scientific, the *Times* report did track with similar recent soundings on other campuses, as well as with the statistical fact that well-educated women with youngsters in the house are indeed now slightly more likely to be at home than were women in the same group a decade earlier.

What accounts for this gradual but real shift in what many of today's privileged young women seem to want? Interestingly enough, one factor appears to be personal experience. "I've seen the difference between kids who did have their mother stay at home and kids who didn't, and it's kind of like an obvious difference when you look at it," one explains. "I see a lot of women in their 30s who have full-time nannies, and I just question if their kids are getting the best," says another. To the exasperation of the older generation of feminists now shepherding them through elite institutions, at least some of these young women have grown up in the very world their progressive foremothers dreamed of—and reject it precisely *because* they know it.

Just as interesting, this demurral based on experience is part of a much larger story now being written by today's adolescents and young adults. A funny thing happened to the kids raised on *Sesame Street* and all the other fare touting politically correct notions of the family: They grew up—and as they did, a significant number looked at their own lives and found progressive happy-talk about the family coming up short.

This questioning—an unforeseen domestic blowback—may not have the status of a full rebellion. But certainly there is insurgency on several fronts. *Women must have full-time careers to be fulfilled*, the dogma that is questioned in the *Times* story and elsewhere, is one such proposition now openly contested. Now consider two other articles of progressive faith that are similarly under assault by young voices of experience: that *all families are equal from the child's point of view*, and that *divorce and other forms of family breakup or novelty do no lasting harm*.

For years now, scholarship based on actual testimony of kids from broken homes—in particular, Judith Wallerstein's unequalled 25-year study, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*—has successfully challenged and overruled both ideas. Hundreds more dissenting voices of young adults, surveyed in Elizabeth Mar-

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quardt's new book, *Between Two Worlds*, confirm the findings of Wallerstein and like-minded revisionist scholars. Of course the usual qualifiers apply—not all biological parents can live together, not everyone suffers equally from a broken home, and many children appear to weather losing one or another parent just fine. But the work of Wallerstein and Marquardt, grounded firmly on what the grown-up children of divorce report themselves, confirms what some enlightened people still want very much to deny: The children of broken homes operate at an emotional disadvantage to their peers with intact biological parents—a disadvantage that persists, in the telling of many, on into adulthood.

One does not need to look to scholarship alone to find many of today's kids and young adults openly nostalgic for that mother of all scapegoats, the nuclear family itself. The most dramatic evidence of this yearning comes from an unexpected place: popular music.

To survey the biggest acts of the last several years—among them Blink 182, Papa Roach, Korn, Nickelback, Everclear, Pink, Good Charlotte, Tupac Shakur, and Eminem—is to find oneself far off the progressive reservation indeed. Unbeknownst to many adults, divorce, abandonment, dysfunction, and absent parents are now some of the themes that make contemporary platinum go round. Aforementioned artist Pink, to cite one of many examples, devoted an entire (hit) album to the subject of her parents' divorce. Good Charlotte, profiled on the cover of *Rolling Stone* as "The Polite Punks," sing repeatedly of family breakup (three of the four members had divorced parents, and two went so far as to legally change over to their mother's maiden name). Everclear's ubiquitous top-40 hit of a few years ago, "Wonderful," was one long lament for a broken home by a boy narrator who wanted his family back—and was only one of many contemporary hits that could be summarized in exactly those words.

Similarly, parents who have long wondered what makes Eminem the bestselling recording artist in America might look no further than these themes, scrawled large on every album he has released: *My father left me; my mother neglected me; I'll never abandon my own child the way my parents did me*. Of course Eminem's music, like that of most other current balladeers, also plumbs themes of sex, drugs, and rock and roll (to say nothing of date rape, mayhem, and violence). Yet its insistence on the damage done by abdicating adults is also an unmistakable, if backhanded, compliment to the nuclear family. And it affirms along with many other such voices that from the point of view of some significant number of young adults, at least some of the social experimentation of the recent past has gone awry.

As progressive sociologists like to point out, widespread divorce, illegitimacy, dual-income homes, and other changes to the way kids now grow up are indeed here to stay. As they also like to point out, children are in fact resilient, and many will simply thrive no matter what is thrown their way. But what emanates from the popular culture these days is a dissenting point: Some will not. Moreover, in an era when half of all children will live without a biological parent in the home at some point in growing up, when the 2004 statistic for babies born to unwed mothers reached a record 34-plus percent, and when creative minds demand ever more recognition for what are said to be ever braver new experiments in family formation, the unhappy testimonials of these former children have not peaked. They have only just begun. ♦

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Assad State of Affairs

Arab nationalism dies in Syria.

BY LEE SMITH

Damascus

THURSDAY AFTERNOON is the start of the weekend here, but the Christian Quarter of the Old City, home to most of Damascus's liveliest bars, restaurants, and cafés, seems strangely subdued.

"People are scared and angry," says D, a 22-year-old student and journalist from Syrian television with whom I'm spending the day, walking around and speaking with ordinary Syrians whose most palpable fear right now is of what they believe is an imminent U.S. attack.

"We'll fight the Americans," says T, a 25-year-old businessman whose presence in this trendy café suggests that he probably will not fight but may have enough money to finance some fighting. "I'm a Christian," he says, "but it doesn't matter—Christian, Muslim—we're all Syrians, and we'll fight as Syrians."

During my last trip to Damascus, in the winter, I was surprised to find Syrians who believed that they might be better off if the Assad regime fell. I am less surprised now to see how that enthusiasm has been tempered. It's not that President Bashar al-Assad has finally won the hearts and minds of his people; rather, many Syrians see the sectarian violence in Iraq, and they are fearful the same might happen here.

T may say he's ready for the Americans, but I wonder if he isn't more concerned about having to fight other Syrians, especially the country's overwhelmingly Sunni Arab majority. There's a reason the ruling Alawites have cloaked themselves in Arab nationalism—it disguises the fact that a minority sect some Sunnis consider heretical is running the country. But D, like virtually all Syrians, is very sensitive about anything touching on the country's confessional issues, so she won't let me ask T, and we move along.

D is an Alawite whose father used to hold a high diplomatic post under Hafez al-Assad. By all accounts, Bashar's father did a much better job of spreading not only the regime's wealth and power among other sects, especially the Sunnis, but also its culpability. Right now Syria's ruling class—Bashar, his brother Maher, and brother-in-law Assef Shawkat—can fit on the head of a pin. And with the U.N. report on the murder of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik al-Hariri due to be released October 25, it's hard to see how the family can entirely escape a day of reckoning.

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How is Syria coping with the pressure? The way it always has, with violence. Last week, a popular Lebanese television journalist was maimed and nearly killed in a car bombing, the latest in a string of assassinations and explosions for which the Syrians and their Lebanese cut-outs are commonly thought responsible. Since Hariri's death, all of the violence has been directed against Christian individuals or Christian areas in a transparent attempt to provoke sectarian fighting. It is worthwhile to note that a state fearful of sectarian conflict runs a regional policy in Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel that aims to provoke elsewhere its own worst nightmares at home.

Still, many Arab officials and Western analysts continue to believe that Washington should find some way to engage Assad. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, for instance, may truly fear the fallout of a collapse in Damascus, but what's even more terrifying to him and other Arab leaders is that if Bashar falls, the Bush administration might think it's on a hot streak. Who knows where the finger will point next? As for the Western analysts who want Bush to warm up to Syria, some are legitimately concerned about the possible fate of Syrian minorities, while others counsel engagement merely out of habit.

"The regime was already given lots of warning and advice," says Farid al-Khazen, a first-term deputy in the Lebanese parliament and a professor of political science at the American University of Beirut. "But it has zero margin for flexibility or adaptation. Even Saddam had a larger base of support than the Syrian regime."

One major difference between the former Iraqi regime and Bashar's is that the latter has very little sectarian depth in the region. While Iraq's once-ruling Sunni minority made up maybe 20 to 25 percent of the country, across the entire Middle East, Sunnis constitute perhaps 70 percent of the population. When Western journalists and academics argue that Sunnis cannot possibly win their insurgency in Iraq because they are a minority, or scoff when Iraqi Sunnis claim that they are actually a majority, it is we who are not recognizing the regional reality. The Sunnis of Iraq may not win back power through their insurgency, but the Sunnis in the region are not going to let their Iraqi coreligionists be decimated in a civil war, either. The problem for Syria's Alawites is that, except for what currently seems like a pretty tenuous alliance

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with Shiite Iran, they have nowhere to turn for help.

This real fear of being surrounded and vulnerable not only drives the regime's authoritarian apparatus, it is also the source of Syrian identity. "Because no one is allowed to touch on sectarian issues," says Andrew Tabler, an American researcher who lives in Damascus, "the Syrians have forged a more or less viable Syrian identity." There's another factor as well. "The regime has been in a state of war with Israel for so long," says Tabler, "that modern Syrian identity is carved out of the struggle against Israel."

Thus Syria—a state that derives its sense of well-being from repression, fear, and hatred—is hardly ready for a peaceful democratic transition. "There is nothing left of civil society," says Khazen. "The Syrian political landscape is a desert. There is no institution that can help the country make a transition."

Washington may hope there is some plausible alternative to the Assads, but none is in evidence—not a secular, democratic opposition, not a reform movement in exile, not moderate Islamists. (Not even Islamist extremists, whose organizational capacity the regime has invariably exaggerated for its own purposes.) Thus, the regime has effectively booby-trapped Syria, and if it falls it is quite likely Syrians will shed each other's blood.

Would a Syria in free fall cause trouble in the region and for the United States? Well, it's unclear whether a failed state exports more violence than one already determined to export violence, especially if it is going to take that failed state a long time to exhaust its own sectarian furies. Moreover, the fact is that Syria's intercommunal violence has already spilled over into Lebanon, Iraq, Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. Eventually, Syrians will have to learn how to construct a positive national identity out of a multisectarian, multiethnic society without dispatching their demons abroad or sweeping them under an Arab nationalist rug. ♦

Their Intentions Are Clear

Iran's leaders won't negotiate away their nuclear program. BY A. WILLIAM SAMII

ON SEPTEMBER 24, the governing board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued its most harshly worded resolution to date on the Iranian nuclear program. The resolution says that "some important outstanding issues" remain unclear despite "two and a half years of intensive inspections." Insisting that "Iran's full transparency is indispensable and overdue," the resolution states that the agency questions Iran's motives for failing to provide all the required documentation and "pursuing a policy of concealment." Although the resolution does not itself refer the case to the U.N. Security Council, it notes suggestively that some of the outstanding questions are "within the competence of the Security Council."

This resolution sends a message to Tehran, but there is no guarantee that Iran's hardline leadership will understand it. Furthermore, the resolution postpones the possibility of referring Iran to the Security Council until November, when IAEA director-general Mohammed ElBaradei is scheduled to deliver his next report. Thus, the agency has given Iran a few more months to work on its nuclear program unimpeded. Referring Iran to the U.N. Security Council—the obvious next step in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program—would have caught the theocrats' attention.

Some commentators will argue that the international community should offer Iran more concessions in order to secure its cooperation, with time the only cost of continued negotiations. Yet time is exactly what Tehran has been playing for since its covert nuclear activities were brought to light three years ago. Tehran has used that interval to pursue its stated objective—the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In particular, Iran seeks to master the fuel cycle. Already it mines and mills uranium at Saqand, converts it at Isfahan, and enriches it at the Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant. One reactor is being built at Bushehr with Russian help, and a heavy-water reactor is being built in Arak.

Iranian officials have been rather open about how they operate—specifically, they've explained in published interviews how they take advantage of drawn-out negotiations with the European Union and the IAEA.

Mohammad Saidi, for example, a top official in Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, acknowledged in an interview published in the daily *Kayhan* on April 12, 2005, that work on the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility continued for five months after Iran signed an agreement with the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to "suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities as defined by the IAEA." Operations at the facility had begun in March 2004, he added, and conversion of yellow cake uranium into uranium tetrafluoride happened the following month. A few months later, Saidi said, raw uranium was processed into uranium hexafluoride.

Then on July 23, 2005, the same paper carried an interview with

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Reuters Photo Archive / Morteza Nikoubazl

Russian-made Sam-6 missiles at a war exhibition south of Tehran.

Hojatoleslam Hassan Rohani, who was secretary of the Supreme National Security Council for 16 years until his replacement in mid-August, and had responsibility for Iran's nuclear account and related interaction with the E.U. and IAEA. Rohani explained how Tehran plays for time and benefits from the continuing negotiations with Europe.

Rohani said Iran did not suspend work at the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility until the project was complete and tested "on an industrial level," by which time it had already produced "a few tons" of uranium hexafluoride. In general terms, he said, "when it comes to suspension, we should comply to the minimum extent, in order to interrupt as little of our activity as possible." Rohani continued, "The day when Natanz [the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant] was suspended, we put all our effort into Isfahan. Now that Isfahan is in suspension, we are fixing other existing flaws."

Then in an August 4 interview with Iranian state television, Rohani provided specific examples of how Tehran makes the most of the time it gains through drawn-out negotiations. He said Iran had not made much progress in nuclear technology as of a year and a half ago—"We had a few centrifuges in Natanz. . . . We didn't have the raw material for enrichment, i.e., the feed, the uranium hexafluoride. Isfahan was being equipped." But since then the Isfahan facility has been completed, and it can now produce uranium hexafluoride. He added, "We have made a great many centrifuges. We prepared them in this period."

Another figure who serves on Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Hussein Musavian, pointed out an additional benefit of the prolonged negotiations: They had prevented an international crisis involving the IAEA Board of Governors, he said on July 17, according to a report by the official Islamic Republic News Agency. Had there been such a crisis, said Musavian, "the great contracts that Iran signed with the Europeans in the fields of oil and gas would be impossible."

The belief that Tehran can be negotiated into forsaking its nuclear pursuits seems far-fetched, when the country's leaders so consistently affirm that Iran will never relinquish them. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who sets the country's general policies and supervises the other branches of government, as well as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his predecessor, Mohammad Khatami, all have insisted on Iran's right to pursue the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Given Iranian officials' statements on their negotiating tactics and on their ultimate objectives, it is not clear why some commentators believe Tehran should be given more time, or even a Grand Bargain. Perhaps they believe that wishful thinking will resolve the issue, or maybe they are projecting their own values and strategic objectives onto Iranian policymakers. Either the commentators are not aware of Tehran's oft-stated policy, regional ambitions, and strategic concerns, or they simply choose to ignore these realities.

Not everybody is so generously inclined towards Tehran. Washington has made clear that it does not want Iran to master the complete fuel cycle. Paris, after two years of futile negotiations in coordination with Berlin and London, seems fed up. It cancelled a late-August meeting with the Iranians, and anonymous French diplomats say a resumption of talks is not on the table because this would vindicate Iran. Indeed, 22 out of 35 members of the IAEA governing board voted in favor of the recent tough resolution, with only Venezuela voting against it and the rest abstaining.

Referring Iran to the Security Council is not the end of the negotiating process—but it is the logical and necessary next step. A range of options are open to the Security Council, from a mild statement that it has noted the IAEA's concerns and report of noncompliance, to a call for sanctions, to endorsement of military action. Adoption of even the mildest measure would strengthen the IAEA by sending a message to Tehran that its actions are unacceptable, and it would show other potential proliferators that they cannot violate their international undertakings with impunity. ♦

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A Kass Act

The chairman of the bioethics council steps down.

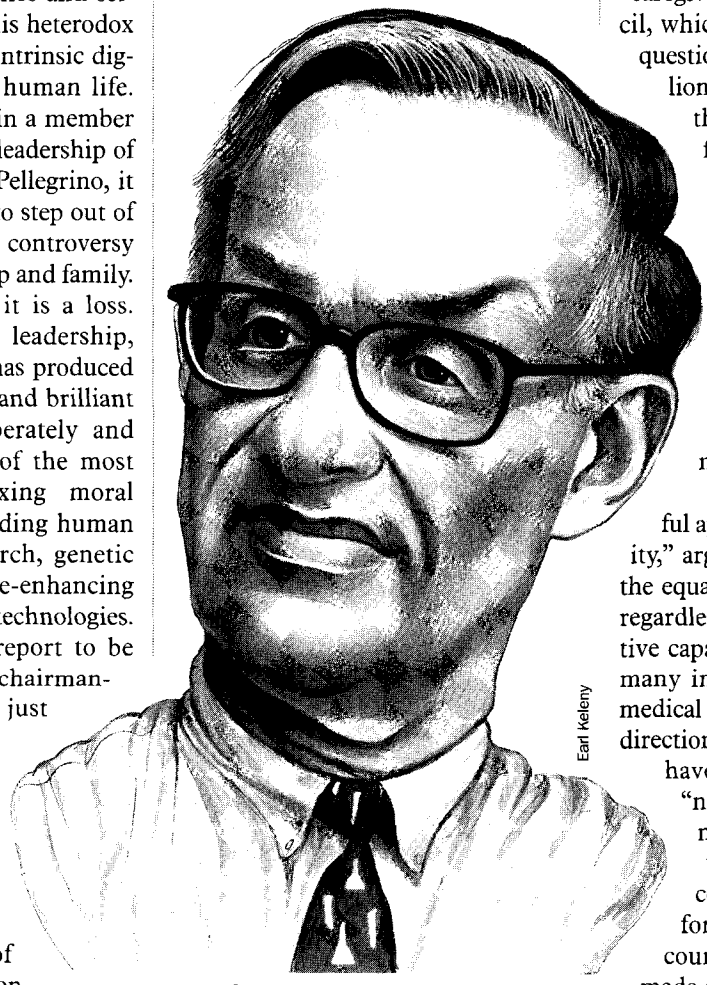
BY WESLEY J. SMITH

LEON KASS has stepped down as chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics. On one level, I am happy for Kass. For four years he has broiled in the pressure cooker of Washington politics, subjected to vituperation and vicious calumny from the bioethics and science establishments for his heterodox (to them) defense of the intrinsic dignity and importance of human life. For Kass, who will remain a member of the council under the leadership of the bioethicist Edmund Pellegrino, it will no doubt be a relief to step out of the klieg lights of public controversy to focus on his scholarship and family.

But for the country, it is a loss. Under Kass's visionary leadership, the President's Council has produced a series of extraordinary and brilliant studies that have deliberately and soberly analyzed some of the most important and perplexing moral issues of our time, including human cloning, stem cell research, genetic engineering, performance-enhancing drugs, and reproductive technologies. And now, in the final report to be published under Kass's chairmanship, the council has just issued *Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society*.

Of all of the council's reports, *Taking Care* is the most relevant to the immediate concerns of millions of Americans. *Taking Care* confronts head-on the ethical dilemmas that arise when caring for dependent elderly people whose cognition has collapsed under the assault of Alzheimer's disease and other disabling brain afflictions.

It is not a pleasant topic, but it is a necessary one. As the report notes, America is a fast-aging society. There are already 4.9 million of us who are 85 or older. By 2030, there will be 9.6 million. Between 2000 and 2050, the population of people aged 65-74 will nearly double to 35 million, and those between the ages of 75 and 84 will increase from 12 million to 26 million. This means that in 2050, more than 60 million Americans will be senior citizens—a population equivalent to France today.



Earl Keleny

Leon Kass

For some, this will work out just fine. As the report notes, many of our elderly are actually "young old"—that is, they are younger and healthier at their age than were members of any previous generation—a trend likely to continue. At the same time, our extended life expectancies—about a third of us already live to age 85—will likely result in vastly increasing numbers of demented and dependent people who will need to be cared for.

This elder explosion will lead to a "caregiving crisis," predicts the council, which raises urgent and pressing questions: Who will care for the millions of people who can't care for themselves? How will we care for them? What ethical standards should govern the many difficult caregiving and medical decisions that will have to be made? *Taking Care* analyzes these and related issues in a manner that is meticulous, logically structured, elegantly written, nuanced, sensitive, and morally sincere.

Taking Care serves as a powerful apologia for the "ethic of equality," arguing persuasively in favor of the equal worth of each human being regardless of health, ability, or cognitive capacity. This is important since many in bioethics seek to push our medical system into a more utilitarian direction and dehumanize people who have lost mental capacities as "nonpersons," of less value and moral worth than the rest of us. Such dehumanization could lead easily to euthanasia for the demented. Hence, the council argues that decisions made on behalf of those who cannot decide for themselves be based on what is best for *them*, not on what might be desired by the caregiver or be perceived as better for society. "Ethical medicine serves health and life," the report states. "It does not judge life's quality—and certainly not as a criterion for treatment eligibility."

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This is not vitalism. The council does not urge that every person be hooked up to every possible medical machine to keep the body breathing for as long as possible. To the contrary: The report explicitly acknowledges that there are times when withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment is the most loving and moral course. But such decisions should not be taken to ease burdens on caregivers, relieve the trauma of watching a beloved suffer, or somehow spare society the cost of caring for an unproductive member.

Toward these ends, *Taking Care* sets forth moral boundaries to guide the decision-making of caregivers, such as "no active killing or assisted killing of another, no matter how painful or diminished a life has become." Caregivers should not aim "at death as a purpose of action, whether by acts of commission or omission." At the same time, there should be "no imposing excessively burdensome treatments on others" and "no obligation to do what we *cannot* do in the role of caregiver, but the obligation to see how much we *can* do without destroying or deforming everything else in our lives."

Needless to say, some areas of discussion will cause controversy. Euthanasia activists will not be pleased to see mercy killing characterized—accurately in my view—as abandonment. Perhaps even more likely to raise a ruckus is the council's pronounced skepticism of the value of advance directives when decisions must be made about whether to accept or refuse treatment on behalf of an incapacitated patient. Rather than creating a detailed living will, which the council believes can never be fully "informed," the report suggests that we instead appoint a trusted loved one or friend to be our health care proxy. Our surrogate's ethical duty would then be to make decisions based "on providing the best care possible" for us rather than adhering strictly to our pre-stated wishes.

I was a little disappointed that *Taking Care* did not directly address specific bioethical controversies that are relevant to the proper care of aged and demented patients, issues that are even now boiling over into heated dispute in the public square. For example, should the decision to remove artificial nutrition and hydration be treated in law and medical ethics differently from decisions about removing other kinds of care, given the symbolism of nourishment and the fact that such a decision can only have one outcome? Does Futile Care Theory, in which hospital protocols grant doctors or hospital bioethics committees the power to refuse wanted life-sustaining treatment, violate the ethic of equality? How are we going to finance Medicare and Medicaid in the face of the coming elder boom?

The report doesn't pretend to answer these and other urgent questions. Rather, its ambitions are more limited, and perhaps more valuable—to get people thinking and talking about these issues before the time of crisis comes. And it points us in valuable directions: By placing such great emphasis on the essential human worthiness of demented patients, the council tips the benefit of the doubt in caregiving firmly in favor of life over death—but in a way that clears the way for caregivers to cease resisting natural death of their wards when the time is right. There is also a valuable chapter devoted to analyzing "hard cases" that seeks to help caregivers learn how to pick their way through the often excruciating difficulties of making proper care decisions for demented patients.

Taking Care is an important, and provocative, ethical document that belongs in every university and medical school bioethics curriculum. More important, it offers a starting point for a badly needed national conversation about a difficult topic that is too often avoided. Leon Kass and the President's Council on Bioethics deserve high praise for another job well done. ♦

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Scandal Season

The long, strange trip of David Safavian—from lobbyist to White House official to criminal defendant.

By Matthew Continetti

"You've got to have ethics and integrity in everything you do. Especially here in D.C. It's such a small town that if you gain a reputation as someone who does not play by the rules, that does not do things with integrity, your career is ended."
—*David Safavian*

On October 7, the former head of federal procurement policy, David Safavian, will appear in District Court in Washington, D.C. Safavian resigned from his senior position at the Office of Management and Budget, the executive branch agency that supervises over $2 trillion in federal spending each year, on Friday, September 16. He was arrested outside his home in Alexandria, Virginia, the following Monday.

Safavian held a little-discussed but important job inside the Bush White House. The federal procurement director oversees annual purchases of goods totaling upwards of $300 billion. He is responsible for contracting and leasing. The post requires Senate approval, and Safavian was confirmed, by unanimous consent, on November 21, 2004. In the days and nights prior to his arrest, we are told, he was working feverishly to supply relief and reconstruction efforts in the Gulf.

Today he is unemployed and a defendant in a criminal probe. In the affidavit submitted for his arrest, the government alleges that Safavian:

> did knowingly and corruptly influence, obstruct, impede, and endeavor to influence, obstruct, and impede the due and proper administration of the law under which a pending proceeding was being had before a department and agency of the United States; and 2) on or about March 27, 2003, in a matter within the jurisdiction of the executive branch of the United States, did knowingly and willfully conceal, and cover up by a trick, scheme, and device a material fact; 3) on or about July 25, 2002, in a matter within the jurisdiction of the executive branch of the United States, did knowingly and willfully conceal, and cover up by a trick, scheme, and device a material fact.

In English: Safavian is accused of obstructing justice.

Matthew Continetti is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

The alleged obstruction took place in the middle of an ongoing investigation of which Safavian was not the target. The target was—is—Safavian's mentor, Jack Abramoff. Abramoff was himself arrested in late August on unrelated charges of wire fraud and conspiracy. But Safavian's arrest suggests that federal authorities are quickly approaching the moment where they may be able to indict Abramoff again. Indict him, and possibly others.

The investigation into Abramoff—the former lobbyist, longtime conservative activist, and prodigious Republican fundraiser—is now in its eighteenth month. A federal task force composed of over 30 agents from the Justice, Treasury, and Interior departments has compiled thousands of pages of documents and made this first arrest. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, led by Sen. John McCain, has held four hearings on Abramoff's activities, and is planning more. The Senate Finance Committee has begun to look into Abramoff's use of charities and nonprofit foundations to shelter profits from taxes and fund overseas trips for congressmen. And a small army of bleary-eyed journalists has devoted thousands of column inches and magazine pages and blog posts to tracing the arc of Abramoff's career, its peaks and valleys, from a footsoldier of the Reagan Revolution to action-movie producer to high-powered Washington attorney to disgraced symbol of avarice and greed.

The story is sometimes difficult to follow. The cast of characters is numerous, the details can be bewildering, and the import of it all is unknown. But it is worth the telling. From 1995 until 2004, Abramoff was a registered lobbyist at the firms Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds and, later, Greenberg Traurig. Among his most lucrative clients were six American Indian tribes—the Louisiana Coushatta, the Louisiana Chitimacha, the Mississippi Choctaw, the El Paso Tigua, the Saginaw Chippewa, and the Agua Caliente of Cahuilla—that owned and operated casinos throughout the United States. In three years, between 2001 and 2004, these tribes paid Abramoff and his associate Michael Scanlon a total of $82 million. The tribes paid a portion of this money directly to Abramoff's law firm, making him one of the highest-paid lobbyists in history. But most of the

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funds—some $66 million—were paid to Scanlon's unregulated "public affairs" firm and a series of nonprofits from which Abramoff could draw at will, including the American International Center, a "think tank" staffed by a decorated lifeguard and located a few blocks from the ocean in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. (See, in these pages, Andrew Ferguson's "A Lobbyist's Progress," December 20, 2004.)

No one is sure exactly what services Abramoff and Scanlon performed in exchange for such high fees. The probable answer is as few as possible. Only a small portion of the money went to actual lobbying of congressmen, and that lobbying mostly was unsuccessful. Abramoff's main accomplishment seems to have been the construction of an elaborate Rube Goldberg machine of self-dealing meant to line his pockets and those of a small group of friends. What has attracted the attention of the national media is that the individuals who make up this coterie are prominent figures in the capital's Republican establishment. The money-grubbing scheming uncovered so far has revealed that establishment to be all too similar to those that came before it.

You will recognize the names. One is former Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed, who turned to his old College Republicans pal Jack Abramoff for help when he founded his consulting firm, Century Strategies, in 1997. Abramoff paid Reed to foment "grassroots support" to shut down casinos that took business away from those paying Abramoff. Reed's work has become an issue in Georgia, where he is running for lieutenant governor. (See my "A Decade of Reed," June 27, 2005.) He has pledged to cooperate with the Senate. But his close associate, antitax activist Grover Norquist, has refused to disclose his group's tax returns. Norquist, whose own lobbying shop represented tribal clients in the late '90s, was the recipient of Abramoff's clients' largesse in the form of sizable donations to his group, Americans for Tax Reform. Meanwhile, because House rules forbid lobbyists from funding a congressman's travel, the House Ethics Committee has opened an investigation into whether Abramoff improperly paid for junkets that former majority leader Tom DeLay took to Scotland and elsewhere. (House rules also forced DeLay to step down last week as majority leader, a position he had held since 2003, after a Texas grand jury indicted him on unrelated campaign-finance conspiracy charges.) Representative Bob Ney is under scrutiny for several statements he entered into the congressional record seemingly at Abramoff's request, several trips he took with Abramoff, and an amendment he attached to a 2002 election reform bill that would have directly benefited one of Abramoff's gaming clients. Today Ney says he was "duped." And Senator Conrad Burns of Montana is under pressure to return the hundreds of thousands of dollars Abramoff and his clients donated to his campaign coffers over the years. He hasn't.

These men are famous, at least in Washington. But there are less-famous others ensnared in Abramoff's web. Congressional underlings often worked with Abramoff to secure favors and carve out loopholes for his clients. They watched Washington Wizards basketball games from the lobbyist's skybox at the MCI Center. They ate dinner at the lobbyist's chic downtown restaurant, Signatures. Some seem to have found the lifestyle so appealing, in fact, that they became lobbyists themselves.

Abramoff's partners and associates occupy positions throughout the executive branch. An ex-lobbyist on the Mariana Islands account—the archipelago, a U.S. territory that is exempt from this country's immigration and minimum wage laws, is a frequent target of labor and human rights groups—works as an assistant secretary at the department of labor. President Bush has nominated a former Abramoff client and ex-Tyco legal counsel to be deputy attorney general. Abramoff's executive assistant at Preston Gates and Greenberg Traurig went on to a similar job with presidential adviser Karl Rove. It's important to note, of course, that none of these individuals has been accused of doing anything illegal. But an Abramoff connection has suddenly become the fastest way to invite press scrutiny and Democratic criticism.

Both are now visited daily upon the White House. When Safavian was arrested, the inquiry into Abramoff shifted from Capitol Hill, where it spent much of the spring and early summer, to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, where it will remain indefinitely. The administration must think its luck is washing away. Washington is flooded with scandal. A flawed federal disaster response, accusations of executive branch cronyism, an ongoing grand jury investigation into who leaked the name of a CIA operative to the press two years ago, a Securities and Exchange Commission inquiry into the Senate majority leader's finances, the DeLay indictment, further investigations into the House leadership—all of these stories are rapidly draining the Republicans' vigor.

But the tale of Abramoff and the Indians looms above the rest. Think of it as a metanarrative, or an epic, or, if you prefer, an *opera buffa*. Over the past year and a half, the characters have been introduced, the major plotlines initiated. The curtain has fallen on one act, and is about to rise for the next. The scene is K Street, where lobbyists ply their trade. City constables cast wary glances at one another as they prepare to make their move. And a previously marginal character who has lurked in the

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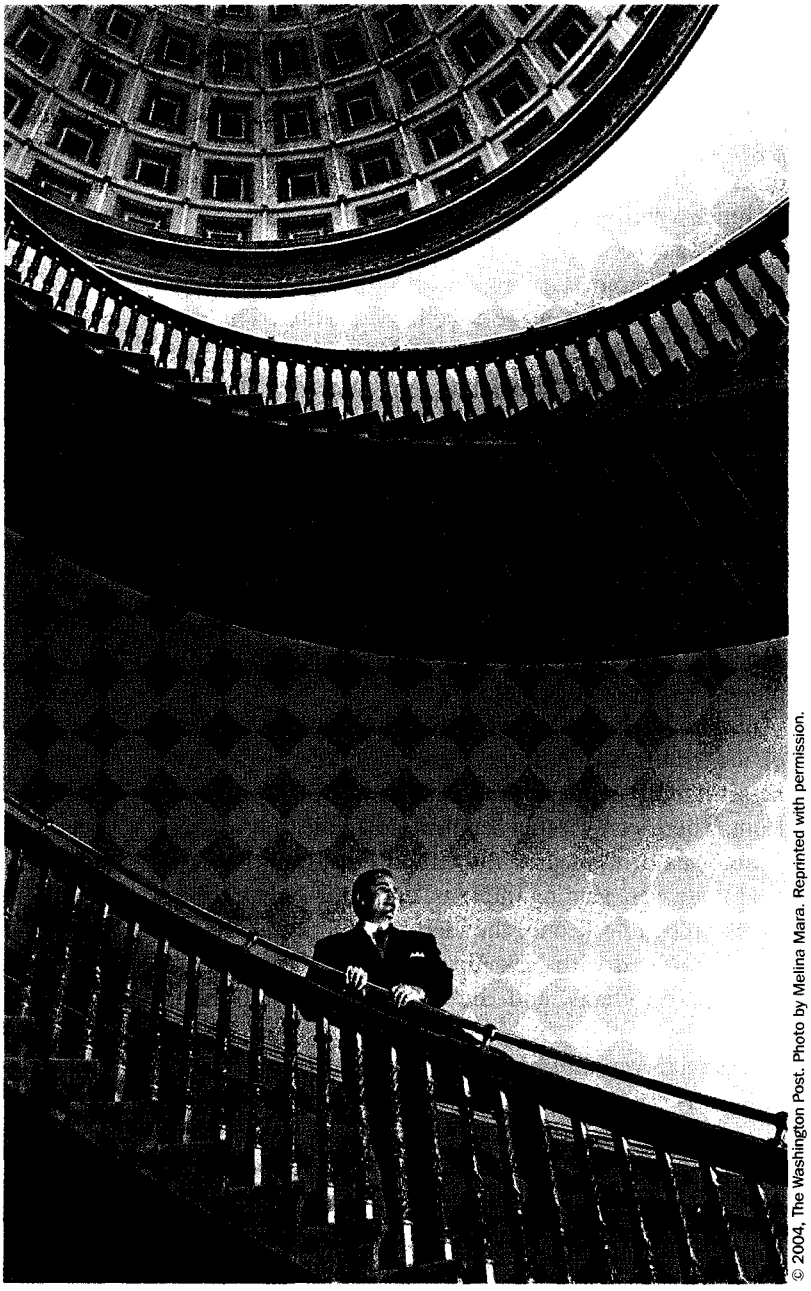
background—a sort of lobbyist Forrest Gump—is about to step to center stage.

Enter David Hossein Safavian.

He is 38 years old, born in Michigan, schooled in Missouri. According to his now deleted biography on the White House website, Safavian went to St. Louis University, and graduated fifth in his class at the Detroit College of Law. The year was 1993. He was drawn to politics at an early age, it seems, and interned in a couple of Republican congressional offices while in college, and worked on Republican congressman Bill Schuette's failed Senate campaign in 1990, and moved to Washington to take a job at KPMG after law school. He earned a certificate in tax law from Georgetown in 1994.

That was the year the Republican party, led by Newt Gingrich, captured the House and Senate for the first time in 40 years, and promised a sea change in American government. A fierce and uncompromising conservatism dove head-first into governing. The Republicans, it was said, would change the way business was done in Washington. They would slash budgets, eliminate a few cabinet departments, more or less drain the swamp of special interests and scandal. It was "a new order," Republican representative Jim Nussle proclaimed. Armed with his degrees and résumé, Safavian made an attractive footsoldier for the Revolution. The question was where he would start.

The Hill beckoned. But so did the more lucrative private sector. To cope with the influx of Republican lawmakers, the capital's numerous lobbying shops had just begun to search for lawyers with the right—meaning, the Right—credentials. Safavian was the type of guy they were looking for. He joined the Seattle-based law firm of Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds in 1995. There he was assigned to the lobbying team headed by Jack Abramoff.



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Safavian in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, after his move to OMB

Abramoff was a recent recruit to the firm himself, having spent the better part of six years struggling to make a name in Hollywood as a movie producer. The Republican landslide had summoned him back to the nation's capital, where he used the connections he had forged as head of College Republicans in the early eighties to start a lucrative third career as an advocate for special interests. He soon became a legend among lobbyists, for three reasons. One was the supranormal fees that clients paid him. Another was the shadowy clients Abramoff represented—often interests, like the dictatorships of Pakistan and Malaysia, that were engaged in questionable behavior. And the third was the high profile of his contacts. "He has access to DeLay," a flack for the then-majority whip told *National Journal* early in the revolution.

For almost three years, from 1995 to 1997, Safavian worked at Abramoff's side. Accounts included the exile government of Macedonia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Microsoft Corporation, and Soyuzkontrakt Trade & Finance, a Russian conglom-

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erate with business in the United States. As an associate, Safavian would have watched his boss flatter and pamper clients, arrange junkets to foreign countries for sympathetic lawmakers and journalists, and, most of all, make a gigantic pile of money. He would also have learned, like other lobbyists, how to substitute the private for the public interest with ease. He was an enormous success.

Such a success, in fact, that in 1997, when Abramoff's longtime comrade Grover Norquist opened a lobbying firm of his own, he made Safavian a partner. The new company was called the Merritt Group, then renamed Janus-Merritt Strategies—Janus, the Roman god of access, of entrances and exits, has two faces—then finally was sold to the Richmond-based firm Williams Mullen in 2002. As with any Norquist venture, the tenor of the firm was fiercely ideological. "We represent clients who really do have an interest in a smaller federal government," Safavian told *Legal Times* in a 1997 interview. "We're all very ideologically driven, and have a bias in favor of free markets." He went on: "We're not letting people who offer us money change our principles."

Scanning Janus-Merritt's lobbying registry, one can divide the firm's clients into a few types. There were businesses like BP America, the U.S. division of British Petroleum. There were foreign companies like the Corporacion Venezolana de Cementos and Grupo Financiero Banorte. And there were gaming interests, including Indian tribes. Janus-Merritt flacked for the Saginaw Chippewa—a client the firm shared with Jack Abramoff—the Viejas band of Kumeyaay Indians, and the National Indian Gaming Association.

Safavian was a passionate advocate of Internet gambling. His clients included the Interactive Gaming Council, a trade association for online betting houses, and CDM Fantasy Sports, which, according to its website, is "one of the leading providers of fantasy sports products and services in North America." In 1999, he founded the Internet Consumer Choice Coalition, a nonprofit whose sole purpose, it would appear, was to fight a bill authored by Republican Arizona senator Jon Kyl that would have made online gambling a federal crime. Coalition members included the American Civil Liberties Union, the Association of Concerned Taxpayers, Citizens for a Sound Economy, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Interactive Services Association, the Small Business Survival Committee, and the United States Internet Council. As is common in the incestuous world of paid advocacy, some coalition members—the Interactive Services Association, for one—were also clients of Safavian's. Another, Americans for Tax Reform, was Norquist's activist group.

Month after month, year after year, ten-thousand-dollar check after check, Safavian helped to defeat the Kyl bill. He was proud of his efforts. And he wasn't afraid to brag about his accomplishments. On December 15, 2000, the Fantasy Sports Trade Association posted a message entitled "FROM SAFAVIAN" on its website. It was a pithy message, but it captured, in its own way, the biases and assumptions, the Manichaean worldview, that lobbyists and activists carry around in their heads. First, using capital letters for emphasis, Safavian wrote: "I AM PLEASE [sic] TO LET YOU KNOW THAT WE WERE SUCCESSFUL. THERE ARE NO INTERNET GAMBLING PROVISIONS IN THE FINAL APPROPRIATION [sic] BILL."

Then he urged his clients—and, presumably, online poker addicts across the globe—to "relax a bit." At least "for now." Because "policy beat politics once again. (Maybe the American system isn't really that bad.)" In this case, he said, "the good guys won."

Janus-Merritt had a fourth type of client: American Muslim activists. Here, too, the firm's choice of clients complemented its politics. Lassoing American Muslims into the Republican coalition has been a longstanding goal of Norquist's. To that end, he established the Islamic Institute in 1998. Officially titled the Islamic Free Market Institute Foundation, the group, according to its website, seeks to "create a better understanding between the American Muslim community and the political leadership" and "provide a platform to promote an Islamic perspective on domestic issues." The Institute also produces numerous pamphlets explaining how Islam is compatible with the free market. Norquist is chairman of the board. Safavian registered as a lobbyist for the institute shortly after it was born.

A prominent American Muslim attorney, Khaled Saffuri, is the executive director of the Islamic Institute. Saffuri is also a friend of Abramoff's. His previous job was at the American Muslim Council, or AMC, an Islamic interest group with a controversial past. That past caught up with Safavian sometime in October 2000, when Janus-Merritt submitted forms to the Senate registering Omar Nashashibi—one of the firm's partners—and several others to lobby for Abdurahman Alamoudi, the then-head of the AMC. Safavian's name is also mentioned in the document.

A naturalized U.S. citizen born in Eritrea, Alamoudi is now serving a 23-year term in federal prison for conspiring to assassinate then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Put simply, Alamoudi is a radical Islamist and terrorist sympathizer who openly supported Hamas and Hezbollah while a client of Janus-Merritt's. There's no way around it: The guy is a bad dude.

Alamoudi first entered the public eye on October 28, 2000, when he took the mike at an anti-Israel rally outside

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the White House and chanted: "I have been labeled by the media in New York to be a supporter of Hamas. Anybody supporters of Hamas here?"

The crowd reportedly cheered, and Alamoudi went on: "Hear that, Bill Clinton? We are all supporters of Hamas. *Allah akbar!* I wish to add here I am also a supporter of Hezbollah. . . . My brothers, this is the message that we have to carry to everybody. It's an occupation, and Hamas is fighting to end an occupation. It's a legal fight. *Allah akbar! Allah Akbar!*"

Abdurahman Alamoudi was a "citizen of the world"—in his case, the world of international Islamic terrorism. The *Jerusalem Post* has reported he attended a conference in January 2001 in Beirut that released a communique which said "America today is a second Israel." On August 11, 2003, while trying to fly to Damascus with $340,000 in cash stuffed in his luggage, he was detained by Scotland Yard at Heathrow International Airport. He told authorities the cash had been given to him by a Libyan intelligence agent, and that the Libyan government had paid him between $10,000 and $20,000 on several occasions. Just like that, Alamoudi had revealed that he was an asset of the Libyan government, and, as he later admitted in a plea agreement, he had been plotting to murder Crown Prince Abdullah for some time.

Between 2000 and 2001 he paid Janus-Merritt Strategies about $40,000 in lobbying fees.

Or did he? Safavian spent much of his Senate confirmation hearing in 2004 scurrying as far away from Alamoudi as he possibly could. "To my knowledge, neither I nor Janus-Merritt did any work for Mr. Alamoudi," he told the Senate in April 2004. "I do not know why Mr. Alamoudi was erroneously listed in the client's lobby disclosure forms." More, "I do not believe Janus-Merritt received any funds from Mr. Alamoudi."

But, according to Senate disclosure reports, this was incorrect. For years Janus-Merritt registered as a lobbyist for Alamoudi. And then, on December 17, 2001, after Safavian had left the firm, Janus-Merritt resubmitted its disclosure forms. This time Alamoudi had been replaced by one Dr. Jamal al Barzinji. Why the firm changed its registration is unknown. For his part, Safavian told the Senate, al Barzinji, not Alamoudi, was his client. "Dr. Jamal al Barzinji," he said, "should have been listed as the client retaining the firm for work related to Malaysian political prisoner Anwar Ibrahim." In fact, Barzinji had been listed as a contact, not a client, on all the disclosure forms. The matter is unresolved.

Let's say, though, that al Barzinji was Safavian's client. That, too, is not really something to be proud of. Al Barzinji, unlike Alamoudi, is a free man. He is a Saudi, and he is the chairman and CEO of Mar-Jac Poultry, which, according to its Yahoo! Finance company profile, "slaughters and processes chickens for sale to foodservice businesses" and "processes 1.5 million pounds of poultry, making 250,000 fast-food products and 100,000 boneless products, per day."

Mar-Jac is located in Gainesville, Georgia, but al Barzinji lives in Herndon, Virginia, where he also serves as the director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought. He is the author of a book, *Working Principles for an Islamic Model in Mass Media Communication*, and he has appeared at numerous panels and conferences, including two at Virginia Tech's "Islam Awareness Week" in the spring of 2003, where he lectured on the "Islamization of Knowledge" and "Islam in America."

Last, but certainly not least, Dr. al Barzinji is a defendant in a massive, several-hundred-plaintiff civil suit against the planners and financial supporters of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The affidavit in that case, clocking in at 259 pages, alleges that al Barzinji is, among other things, an officer of the SAAR Foundation, a Saudi-financed "charity" that "financially supports terrorism." The foundation is composed, the affidavit goes on, of "more than one hundred affiliated organizations registered or doing business at just one of SAAR's addresses in Herndon, Virginia." In 1998 SAAR reported $1.7 billion in revenues, the largest charitable take in history—most of which funds were subsequently diverted to Islamic fundamentalist organizations. "People associated with the SAAR Foundation and its network are also implicated in . . . the United States Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania," the affidavit explains.

And Mar-Jac Poultry, it turns out, and its holding company, Mar-Jac Investments, are wholly owned subsidiaries of the SAAR Foundation. On March 20, 2002, the company's offices, along with the homes of al Barzinji and others, were raided by a federal task force investigating terrorist finances, Operation Greenquest. Al Barzinji is named in the warrant authorizing the search as an "officer or director" of the SAAR Foundation, "controlled by individuals who have shown support for terrorists or terrorist fronts."

Asked about his association with one terrorist, Safavian let slip to the Senate his association with a target in an ongoing criminal investigation. Not smooth. If anyone noticed, however, they gave no clue.

In retrospect, of course, Safavian's choice of clientele—he also registered as a lobbyist for the government of Pakistan, the government of Gabon, and Pascal Lissouba, the corrupt former president of the Republic of the Congo—is unsurprising, and more than a little telling. He was merely following the example of his mentors, Abramoff and Norquist, trafficking with unsa-

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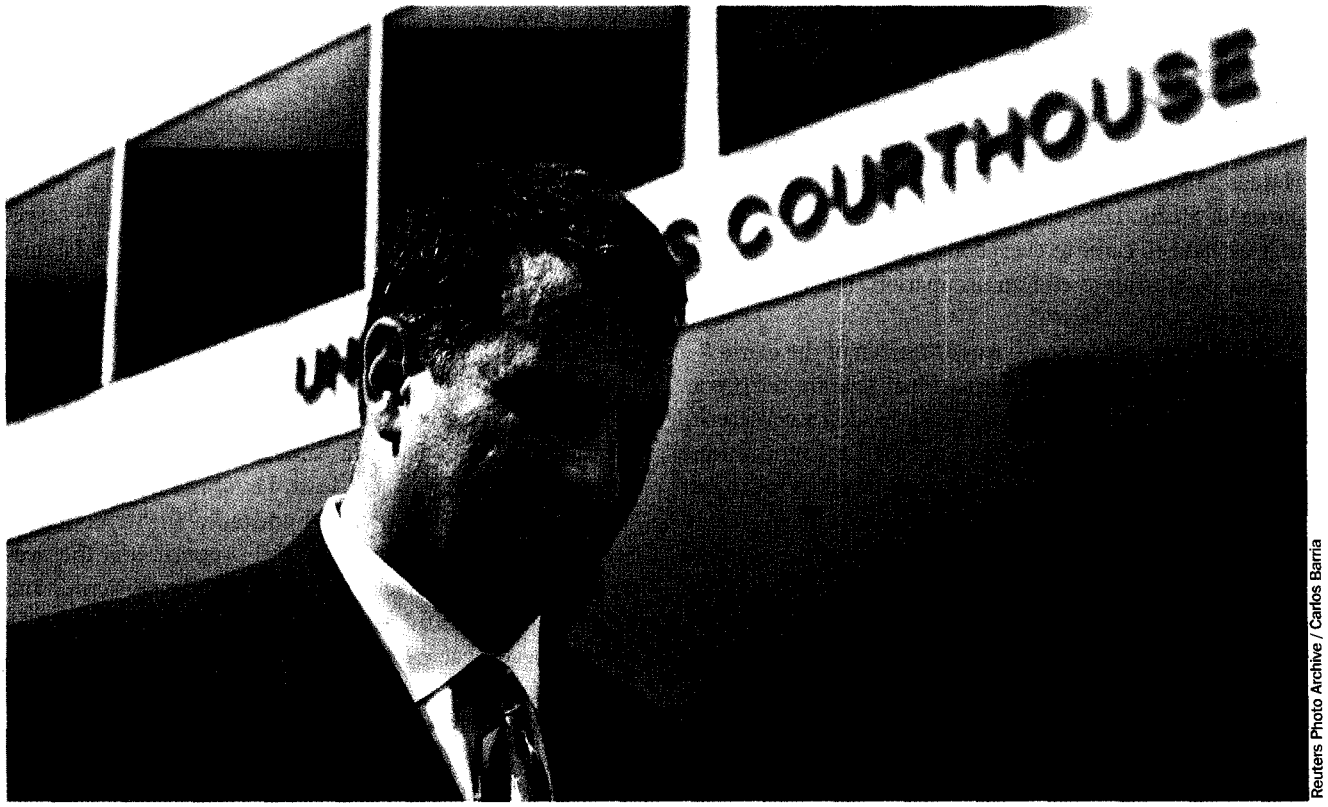

Reuters Photo Archive / Carlos Barria

Lobbyist Jack Abramoff leaves the courthouse in Miami, August 18, 2005.

vory characters in the name of righteous causes. In the '80s, to take the most famous example, the two befriended Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan Maoist "freedom fighter" and alleged cannibal, and lobbied vociferously on his behalf. The names change, but the openness to sketchy rogues remains.

Once again, there's nothing illegal about any of this. You may feel a twinge of melancholy, perhaps, at the ease with which onetime rebels settled in to their post-1994 roles as conservative "movement" chieftains. But you won't find anything that breaks the law. All the disclosure forms were filed appropriately. No wrongdoing can be traced back to the lobbyists, who are paid, after all, to put the best face possible on their client's case. And not even the best advocate knows what his client is up to all the time. Not even the best knows everything about his client's background and beliefs. Right?

"As a lobbyist, you always need to be thinking," Safavian told the Michigan State Law School alumni magazine in the summer of 2002. "You spend your time moving legislation. It all comes down to being an advocate." He had left Janus-Merritt in June 2001 to become Utah Republican congressman Chris Cannon's chief of staff. A reliable conservative, Cannon had hired Safavian, along with Norquist protegée Bethany Noble, for many reasons, fundraising foremost among them.

The two knew how to raise cash. Safavian started the Western Leadership Fund, a political action committee, run out of his home, devoted to Cannon's reelection. Many of the donors had been clients of Safavian's in the private sector, including Indian gaming tribes. Never mind Cannon's position on the gaming issue ("I oppose gambling. I think it's a pernicious vice. I'd like to eliminate it")—a tide of casino money flowed into his war chest between 2001 and 2003. Meanwhile, Cannon voted repeatedly against efforts to restrict online gambling. He and his chief of staff were in sync. All indications are that Safavian liked his boss, and that his boss liked him.

Safavian's tenure as Cannon's chief of staff was painless. And quick. Within a year he had moved on to the executive branch, becoming chief of staff to Stephen Perry, the administrator of the General Services Administration, or GSA. The General Services Administration acts as custodian for all federal properties—it buys them, sells them, and takes care of them in between. It's a peripheral agency, staffed mainly with career bureaucrats. It is far from the center of power. But it has its uses.

Safavian's first day on the job was May 16, 2002. Within a week Jack Abramoff emailed him to ask for a favor.

Abramoff had a problem. In 2001, he had taken millions of dollars from the coffers of the Capital Athletic

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Foundation, the charity he had founded with his wife to fund sports programs for needy kids, and used the money to start the Eshkol Academy, a Jewish day school in suburban Maryland. Now the school needed a new location. Abramoff must have thought that, with Safavian in a key position, he could get a sweet deal on some government property. Specifically, he had in mind renting and perhaps ultimately purchasing a 40-acre tract of land at the White Oak government facility in Silver Spring.

While Safavian was at it, Abramoff had another favor to ask. One of the Indian tribes he represented was also looking to buy some property. Tribal leaders were eyeing the Old Post Office building in downtown D.C., a storied and majestic structure on Pennsylvania Avenue that GSA held in trust. Because American Indians are a minority group, they are eligible for special tax breaks and subsidies when leasing government space. Abramoff wanted his clients to have a heads-up on any potential sale of the Old Post Office.

At this point, we turn to the criminal affidavit filed against Safavian. According to the document, Abramoff first emailed Safavian about the White Oak property on May 24, 2002. A few weeks later, on June 14, Abramoff sent an email to one of his coworkers saying that Safavian was "going to join us in Scotland." The Scotland trip—a golf junket to the famous St. Andrews course—had been planned for some time. It was a special thank-you to Rep. Ney, who had tried to insert language reopening one of Abramoff's clients' casinos into an election reform bill that year.

In June 2002, Abramoff had asked the client, the El Paso Tigua, to pay for the trip: "Our friend"—that would be Ney—" . . . asked if you could help (as in cover) a Scotland golf trip for him and some staff (his committee chief of staff) for August. The trip will be quite expensive (we did this for another member—you know who)"—that would be Tom DeLay—"2 years ago. Let me know if you guys could do $50k . . . they would probably do the trip through the Capital Athletic Foundation as an educational mission." The Tigua had no money, however. They couldn't pay for the trip. Abramoff took the money from the Capital Athletic Foundation instead.

After reading Abramoff's email saying Safavian would be on the golf trip, the coworker shot back: "Why dave? I like him but didn't know u did as much. Business angle?"

Abramoff replied the next day. "Total business angle," he wrote. "He is new COS of GSA."

Much correspondence ensued, all helpfully included in the affidavit. On June 19, Abramoff emailed Safavian to ask how his casino clients could best lease the Old Post Office from the government. And on June 30 he wrote Safavian yet again, this time returning, once more, to the subject of land for his school:

> Can you find out if you guys have control of any part of a huge federal property called the White Oak Federal Research Center, off New Hampshire Ave in Silver Spring? I want to try to get 40 acres of that tract if possible for a non-profit. Is it doable?

A few days later Safavian replied:

> We have not fully allocated all of the acreage at White Oak. We are still surveying whether any other federal agencies are interested. If not, we would begin disposal (i.e., sale or donation) proceedings. As for the other project . . .

Safavian was referring to the potential lease of the Old Post Office.

> . . . you should know that aside from section 8a preferences, Indian tribes also have "hub zone" status, which provides for enterprise zone-like tax benefits. You will need to ramp up on this as it is progressing. Let's discuss. Dhs.

The two continued their correspondence throughout the month of July. We're told that they mostly talked about the upcoming golf trip. Then, on July 21, Abramoff wrote to Safavian, in an email with the subject line "White Oak": "The facility is secured, as I understand. Any thoughts on how we could get a tour there without giving a heads up to too many folks?" Abramoff must have thought that Safavian would work something out. Later in the day, he wrote a coworker that the chief of staff was "totally supportive."

Meanwhile, Safavian advised Abramoff on the Old Post Office deal. On July 22, 2002, Abramoff sent Safavian a draft of a letter that his allies in Congress were willing to send to Safavian's boss. According to the affidavit, the letter urged the GSA to give "special consideration" to "HUBZone businesses," such as those owned by Indian tribes. Appended to the letter was a question Abramoff had for Safavian: "Does this work, or do you want it to be longer?"

And so it went, on and on, Abramoff emailing questions about both the Old Post Office and the parcel of land in Silver Spring, Safavian responding with answers and suggestions. Reading these emails, you are struck by their banality, the drudgery of government life, the glacial speed with which the bureaucracy conducts business. You are struck, too, that neither party gave any hint that he was behaving suspiciously or unusually. And perhaps they weren't behaving so. Perhaps this was just business as usual.

But then something changed. On July 25, a few days before leaving for Scotland, Safavian contacted a GSA

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ethics official. What was the policy, he wondered, governing overseas vacations paid for by lobbyists? At issue, he wrote in an email, "is airfare":

> The host of the trip is chartering a private jet to take the eight of us from BWI to Scottland [sic] and back. He is paying the cost for the aircraft regardless of whether I go or not. In fact, none of the other guest [sic] will be paying a proportional share of the aircraft costs. I need to know how to treat this activity.
>
> One other point of relevance: *the host is a lawyer and lobbyist, but one that has no business before GSA (he does all of his work on Capitol Hill).*

The emphasis is added, just as it is in the affidavit, for what should be obvious reasons: To write that Abramoff "has no business before GSA" was a stretch, to say the very least. The ethics officer took Safavian at his word. What reason did he have not to? "Based upon the information you have provided," he wrote to Safavian, "you may accept the gift of free transportation from your friend." No doubt pleased with this answer, Safavian forwarded the ethics officer's email to Abramoff under the message "It looks like Scotland is a go."

That wasn't the only thing he forwarded to Abramoff on July 26, 2002. He also sent along an email that had been under discussion at the agency, which, according to the FBI affidavit, outlined "alternatives for transferring NSWC-White Oak to 'high school and sports academy'"—specifically, Abramoff's Eshkol school. Safavian was frustrated. "This is the type of bureaucracy I'm dealing with," he vented in another email to his mentor. "I am still running the traps on the [one] year lease."

A few days later, in a reply to a message that Abramoff had sent to his home email, Safavian added a few comments, in brackets, to a letter that Eshkol's lawyers planned to send to the General Services Administration:

> I would add a couple of paragraphs concerning the school's history (if there is some), its mission, its annual budget, etc. How is this unique or different than schools currently available to students from the area. If you are comfortable with it, I would also add a paragraph explaining what happened with Montgomery County in order to drive home the urgency of this issue. . . . I would NOT raise the possibility of obtaining GSA land from White Oak. That could be seen as an unofficial reason to deny your request for use of the property this year.

Meantime, Safavian wanted to hold a meeting. He talked to Abramoff, who then wrote to his wife and to two other school officials. Things were moving ahead at full speed, Abramoff explained. "They"—GSA officials—"want to meet downtown on Friday at 11:30 A.M. at the GSA building. . . . David"—Safavian—"does not think that I should be there, given my high profile politically. I agree. the three of you can go, though."

Later Abramoff sent another email to his wife:

> David does not want [Abramoff] used in the meeting. when you check in at the door, however, you'll need your driver's license, and it's OK for you to be [Abramoff] there, since that won't get up to the guy in the meeting (who probably does not know me, but David and I don't want to take a chance). OK?

OK. The meeting took place on August 2. All indications are that it went off without a hitch.

The very next day Safavian, Abramoff, Ney, and Ralph Reed, among others, boarded a private jet to Scotland. The St. Andrews trip lasted eight days, August 3 to August 11. It included a stop in London, and like all Abramoff junkets it was a lavish affair, costing well over $100,000. Everyone had a blast.

Let's pause, for a moment, to ask which man, Abramoff or Safavian, master or apprentice, thought he was getting the better of the other. Safavian was helping Abramoff on several fronts, and perhaps, to his mind, got a golf trip out of it. And although Safavian told the ethics officers that Abramoff had "no business pending" at the agency, Abramoff certainly thought he did. A lobbyist of his caliber, no doubt, would think that a week on the links could only help his cause. Then again, perhaps the two were playing one another, or each was simply trying to help a friend. With Abramoff and his friends it is always hard to tell.

In the end, though, Abramoff's efforts went nowhere. The Indians never leased the Old Post Office building. The Eshkol Academy never found a new home on government property. A lack of success is one of the Abramoff saga's recurring themes—a lot of people paid him a lot of money, but no one, in the end, can tell you exactly what the clients got in return. Eshkol closed in 2003. Abramoff had spent over $4 million of the Capital Athletic Foundation's money on it.

On March 26, 2003, according to the FBI affidavit, an anonymous tipster contacted the General Services Administration's office of the inspector general. The tipster had information regarding Safavian's trip to Scotland. The information seemed substantive enough to warrant further inquiry. The GSA inspector general interviewed Safavian, who said that Abramoff had no business with GSA in August 2002, that he had taken the time for the trip from his annual leave, and that, in fact, he had *reimbursed* Abramoff for his plane tickets and accommodations. Then Safavian gave the inspector general a copy of a check he had written to Abramoff for $3,100, dated August 3, 2002, the day he left for St. Andrews. Safavian was cooperative. Everything seemed in order. The inspector general closed the inquiry.

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On November 3, 2003, President Bush nominated Safavian to head the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Procurement Policy. Bush resubmitted the nomination on January 22, 2004, and the Senate confirmed Safavian later that year. At his nomination hearing Democratic representative John Conyers of Michigan told the Senate Government Affairs Committee that "this is probably a very great morning, a very great day for our country, for his family."

Except for a brief college internship at the Pentagon, Safavian had little experience in federal procurement, but, as Conyers pointed out, he did have a happy family. His wife Jennifer was chief counsel to Republican representative Tom Davis of Virginia, head of the House Committee on Government Reform. Jennifer Safavian's purview included . . . yup, federal procurement. Which her husband now ran for the executive branch.

Eager to stave off any potential conflicts of interest, Mrs. Safavian's bosses dashed off a letter on December 9, 2003, outlining the committee's recusal policy. "Effective immediately," they wrote, "Ms. Safavian will be recused from all matters where the conduct of officials and employees of the Office of Management and Budget is the central issue." Furthermore, "Ms. Safavian will be recused, also effective immediately, from oversight or investigation of any specific procurement matter at an agency or department other than OMB." Which recusal policy doubtless also extended to the Safavian breakfast nook and television room.

And yet, if this was a conflict of interest, no one raised a fuss. As Safavian settled into his new job, the investigation into Abramoff shuffled forward. Reporters and federal investigators began to look into the August 2002 junket. When asked about his week in Scotland, Safavian would repeat what he had told the GSA inspector general in 2003. "The trip was exclusively personal," he told the *Washington Post* this past January. "I did no business there. . . . Jack is an old friend of mine."

He told the same thing to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee:

> As you may know, I was invited by [Abramoff] to join his trip to Scotland in August, 2002. [Abramoff] and I have had a relationship since 1994, when I worked as a new associate at [the Washington, D.C.] law firm where he was a partner. When the invitation was made, I was the chief of staff to the U.S. General Services Administration ("GSA"). [Abramoff] did not have any business before the agency at that time. . . . Counsel determined that I could accept the value of the trip *gratis*; it did not meet the definition of a "gift from a prohibited source" under the applicable regulations, nor was it considered a gift given because of my official position. Nevertheless, in the exercise of discretion, I gave [Abramoff] a check for the value of the trip prior to departure. In addition, I took leave without pay to travel.

And, according to his FBI affidavit, he told the same thing to the federal task force investigating Abramoff:

> During this interview, SAFAVIAN stated in substance and in part that [Abramoff] had asked about acquiring land for Entity A and the OPO significantly well after the August 2002 Scotland trip and that, at the time of the trip, [Abramoff] had no business with GSA.

It was this series of obfuscations, of sly recastings of events, that ultimately led to Safavian's arrest.

At issue is whether Abramoff's dealings with Safavian on the White Oak property and the Old Post Office building constitute "business with GSA." Safavian's lawyer, Barbara Van Gelder, says they do not. "I don't believe that setting up meetings to figure out whether or not there is property available is doing business," she told the *New York Times*. "We think this is a creative use of the criminal code to try to secure Mr. Safavian's cooperation in other matters," she told *Government Executive*. The charges against him will be fought "vigorously," she has said.

Safavian may not have believed he was doing business, of course, but Abramoff did. For one, there's his email explaining that inviting Safavian on the Scotland trip was a "total business angle"—which email is likely to prove crucial to the government's case. For another, if asking for help to lease two properties from the government isn't business . . . well, what is?

Safavian's defense is Clintonian, resting on subtle and sophistic rhetorical interpretation. It worked for Clinton—maybe it will work again. But who would have thought that a member of the Bush administration, which promised to restore integrity to the White House, would adopt the legalistic defense of its immediate predecessor? Who would have thought that nine months into a second term, with increased majorities in the House and Senate, scandal would deluge the Republicans? Who would have expected that heretofore unknown political appointees like Safavian and ex-FEMA director Mike Brown and others would become symbols of the Republican party's troubles?

Van Gelder is right about one thing. The government *would* probably like to secure Safavian's cooperation. The investigation of Abramoff has reached a critical stage. Safavian's testimony—and that of Michael Scanlon, who is reportedly in talks with authorities—could be the first step on the way to additional indictments. His arrest is the first slippage along the fault line, the first crack in the ice, the first leak in the dam. There will likely be others. The case of *United States of America* v. *David Hossein Safavian* is only the beginning. ♦

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Project for a New Chinese Century

Beijing plans for national greatness.

By Max Boot

It seems like only a few months ago that commentators were blithely babbling about how much relations between Beijing and Washington had improved since the start of the Bush administration, which was marred by China's downing of an American EP-3 surveillance plane and the detention of its crew. The conventional wisdom was that the war on terrorism had united the United States and China against a common enemy. This rosy scenario is, unfortunately, being undermined almost daily by Beijing's actions.

Consider what the Chinese Communist leadership has done just in the past year: It passed an "Anti-Secession Law" asserting its legal authority to employ "nonpeaceful means" against Taiwan should the island democracy take any steps toward independence. Along with Russia, it pressured Central Asian republics to kick out U.S. bases being used in the war on terrorism; U.S. forces are now vacating a supply hub in Uzbekistan. In return for this, China has offered no useful assistance whatsoever in the fight against Islamist fanatics. Instead it held its first-ever military exercise with Russia—an exercise transparently focused on combating the United States—and agreed to purchase billions of dollars in Russian military equipment. And it continued its breakneck military buildup, which is focused on the kinds of weapons—especially missiles and submarines—needed to stymie U.S. efforts to protect Taiwan.

It also continued its massive campaign of industrial espionage intended to steal U.S. military and technological secrets. It has made some progress in protecting intellectual property but still tolerates massive copying of proprietary material that costs U.S. companies an estimated $2.6 billion a year.

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Moreover, it did not reprimand, much less fire, a major general in the People's Liberation Army who publicly threatened to nuke "hundreds" of U.S. cities if the United States came to Taiwan's defense. It continued cozying up to odious regimes in places like Sudan, Venezuela, and Iran, whose oil it covets. It has also made clear that it will not cooperate in the U.N. Security Council or elsewhere in taking firm steps against nuclear proliferation by Iran and North Korea. Rather than using its considerable leverage on Pyongyang, it has brokered a replay of the 1994 Agreed Framework under which Kim Jong Il gets more foreign aid—including a "civilian nuclear reactor"—in return for the promise, but not the reality, of nuclear disarmament. Beijing also organized demonstrations, which turned into riots, aimed at America's foremost Asian ally, Japan. And, just to rub it in, China has pressed to exclude the United States from an East Asia summit meeting in Malaysia in December.

To be sure, the blame for greater Sino-American friction does not rest entirely with Beijing. The Bush administration and Congress, at the bidding of domestic protectionist lobbies, have done their best to irritate China through pressure to devalue its currency and limit its exports to the United States. And, despite all these tensions, there are also some signs of cross-Pacific friendship—China did agree this year to devalue its currency slightly and to buy $5 billion worth of aircraft from Boeing rather than its European rival. But there is little doubt that the Sino-American relationship is more strained today than at any time since 2001, the year of the EP-3 incident, mostly because of greater Chinese assertiveness and increased willingness to challenge American "hegemonism."

This is worrisome news on many levels. China, with a population of 1.3 billion people, is the world's most populous country. It also has the world's biggest, if far from the best, armed forces, with over 2.2 million personnel in its active-duty ranks (800,000 more than the United States), as well as the world's second-

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largest—and fastest-growing—defense budget. Its underlying economic power is rapidly expanding, too. Although most Chinese people remain poor (average per capita income, at $5,600, is lower than in the Dominican Republic), China is already the world's second biggest economy. Its GDP of $7.3 trillion, as measured in purchasing power parity, trails only the United States (at $11.7 trillion), and it is growing much faster. Last year China's economic growth rate was 9.1 percent, more than twice the U.S. rate of 4.4 percent. At this pace, China will overtake the U.S. economy in a little over a decade. There are good reasons to think that China's breakneck economic growth will not last forever: Lawlessness, lack of secure property rights, endemic corruption, social unrest, resource shortages, and other problems may well sabotage its long-term prospects. But even now China is a formidable competitor to the United States—indeed, it is the only Great Power threat on the horizon.

History, alas, teaches that it is difficult if not impossible to integrate peacefully a major illiberal challenger into an international system it did not design and does not control. Just ask the British, who 100 years ago occupied the strategic niche that America fills today—a global hegemon threatened by powerful upstarts. In America's case the rival is China; in Britain's it was Germany and Japan. The British tried confrontation with Germany (symbolized by the 1904 Anglo-French *Entente Cordiale* and an Anglo-German naval arms race) and appeasement with Japan (the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance and considerable aid for the Imperial Japanese Navy until the late 1920s). Neither policy worked, and the result was two of the most horrific wars in history. The United States did a little better in managing the rise of the Soviet Union, but the Cold War still resulted in the deaths of some 100,000 Americans in Korea and Vietnam.

Chinese apologists will huffily reply that their country has nothing in common with Germany, Japan, or the Soviet Union. In the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Zheng Bijian, a veteran Communist party apparatchik with close ties to President Hu Jintao, assures us: "China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II, when these countries violently plundered resources and pursued hegemony. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination in the Cold War. Instead China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries in the world."

It's true that China is not actively acquiring colonies (at least not since the occupation of Tibet in 1951) or fighting other countries (at least not since the invasion of Vietnam in 1979). But neither are its actions as benign as Zheng would have it. Certainly it would come as news to Japan—whose territorial waters were violated last fall by a Chinese submarine and some of whose businesses were attacked this spring by Chinese mobs—that China strives for peace and "cooperation with all countries." It will come as even greater news to Taiwan, which has been on the receiving end of blood-curdling threats of "annihilation" should it ever dare to declare its independence—threats backed up by the presence of 500-550 short-range ballistic missiles deployed across the Taiwan Strait, with 75 new ones added every year. And, finally, it will come as news to the military and political architects of Chinese strategy who consider the United States to be the "main enemy," according to a Chinese diplomat who recently defected in Australia.

China may not be seeking global domination—at least not yet—but it is definitely seeking regional domination. And the region it is trying to dominate will be as important, politically, militarily, and economically, to the rest of the world in this century as Europe was in the last one.

That does not mean that war is inevitable by any stretch of the imagination, but it does mean that we need to make a greater effort to nudge China off its long-term collision course with the United States. As the failure of British policy toward Germany and Japan indicates, there is no guarantee that any U.S. policy will succeed in making this awakening dragon mind its manners. But we have to try. Since we can't be sure any particular policy will work, the safest course would seem to be to try a bit of everything—economic integration, diplomatic containment, military deterrence, and internal subversion. Unfortunately, we're not doing a very good job on any of these fronts right now.

The West has been most successful in fostering China's economic integration through membership in the World Trade Organization and increasing levels of trade and investment. But protectionist lobbies seem intent on sabotaging these gains through shrill harping on such purported Chinese sins as having a strong currency and selling too many bras to American women. The Bush administration first bludgeoned Beijing into devaluing the yuan and now (along with the European Union) has restricted Chinese textile imports.

It may make sense to use economic leverage to influence Chinese behavior, but it should be done in pursuit of such vital aims as ending the North Korean nuclear program—not in aid of the hopeless American textile industry. Chinese imports (that is, goods that American consumers want to buy) are no threat to the United States, any more than Japanese imports were in the 1980s. Harping on our current trade deficit with China will prove no more productive than harping on Japan's huge trade surpluses did back then.

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The same is true of Chinese direct investment. In the 1980s Americans were alarmed about the Japanese purchase of Rockefeller Center and Columbia studios. It turned out to be much ado about nothing. Likewise today, purchases made by Chinese firms are, in general, no big deal. Investments by state-owned firms—such as China National Offshore Oil Corporation's aborted bid for Unocal or Lenovo's successful bid for IBM's PC division—are slightly more troubling but should not be forbidden unless they risk handing over control of vital assets such as stealth technology. Neither ThinkPads nor, in all likelihood, Unocal's oil holdings fall into the high-value category.

While the Chinese quest for petroleum has gotten a lot of attention, and rightly so, this does not have to lead to a zero-sum mercantilist competition. True, China is now the world's second-biggest oil importer, behind the United States. But oil, far from sparking a conflict akin to the Anglo-Dutch trade wars of the 17th century, could actually be grounds for cooperation, since both the United States and China would like to lessen their dependence on imports. They could cooperate on alternative technologies such as electric hybrid engines and hydrogen fuel cells. This could have the added benefit of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with Kyoto goals, as proposed under the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate announced in July between the United States, Australia, China, India, Japan, and South Korea.

But even if we avoid a trade war and actually find new areas of cooperation, there is no guarantee that China's growing lucre will translate into peace in our time. In 1914 Germany was the second-richest nation in the world—and the most militaristic. Optimists think that China will eventually go the way of South Korea and Taiwan, both onetime autocracies that liberalized after getting rich. That may well happen, and for that reason, if no other, we need to keep trading with China. But it's just as plausible that China will follow the path of autocratic states like Germany and Japan, which in the early 20th century combined capitalism with expansionism. Indeed, there are more than faint echoes of Kaiser Wilhelm II and General Tojo in the fervor with which the Communist party oligarchy has adopted xenophobic nationalism as the justification for its continued rule.

Even as we do business with China, therefore, we need to strengthen our ability to dissuade it from aggression. Despite the shrill reaction he provoked from Beijing, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was right to publicly warn in June that China's defense buildup was an "area of concern" for its neighbors. That warning needs to be repeated—and backed up with action. Asian democracies need to increase their military spending while extending explicit defense commitments to block potential Chinese aggression.

The studied ambiguity cultivated by the United States over the fate of Taiwan since the opening to the mainland in the 1970s was potentially dangerous. It might have risked a repeat of Secretary of State Dean Acheson's blunder in January 1950 when he did not include South Korea in the U.S. "defensive perimeter," thereby inviting Communist aggression six months later. President Bush has, therefore, been right to bluntly declare that "our nation will help Taiwan defend itself," and Japan has been right to make slightly more explicit its own commitment to Taiwan's defense. It would be useful if China's other neighbors—states like South Korea, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, the Philippines, perhaps even Vietnam—were to make similar commitments. That would do much to keep the peace in East Asia, and it should be an aim of U.S. diplomacy.

More broadly, the United States should strive to create, if possible, an Asian analogue to NATO. The Bush administration is right to deepen U.S. links with old allies like Japan and Australia and to establish closer ties to newer allies like India and Singapore. That process needs to continue, especially in firming up the nascent U.S.-India entente. But it would be good, if possible, to move from bilateral relations to a regional defense framework so that states in the region would work closely not only with the United States but also with one another. That won't be an easy goal to accomplish. China has been skillful in trying to wean Asian states away from the United States by a combination of military, diplomatic, and economic pressure. Most neighbors don't want to do anything to offend the 800-pound panda. (In this connection it is worth noting that Japan, South Korea, and Australia now trade more with China than with the United States.) But it is just possible that the United States, if it makes this a top priority, may be able to take advantage of growing unease about China's rise to knit together a coalition for its containment. To lessen Beijing's fear factor, such an organization could establish ties with the Chinese military, too, and make clear that regional stability is in everyone's interests—including China's.

Alliances are highly desirable, but to be credible they need to be backed up by force—an area where most of America's Asian allies are not terribly credible. While China spends 4 percent or more of its GDP on defense (probably a lot more), according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, its neighbors trail far behind. The figures are: Japan 1 percent, the Philippines 1 percent, Thailand 1.3 percent, Australia 2.3 percent, Taiwan 2.4 percent, India 2.6 percent, and South Korea 2.8 percent. (The one exception is tiny Singapore, which spends a whopping 5.2

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percent.) The United States should strive to reduce free-riding by its allies—one hopes with more success than we've had with our European friends. In the case of Japan, that means supporting a move to amend the MacArthur-era constitution which makes it difficult to send the Self-Defense Forces abroad (including for the defense of Taiwan or South Korea) and a more recent political decree that caps military spending at 1 percent of GDP.

In the case of Taiwan—the state most directly threatened by rising Chinese power—that means continued pressure to get it to do more for its own defense. Although the United States agreed four years ago to sell Taipei $18 billion worth of vital weaponry, minority KMT legislators in thrall to the mainland have blocked the necessary legislation in parliament. The failure to modernize its armed forces is creating a dangerous vulnerability. The United States is not entirely blameless here; it needs to lift restrictions on high-level military-to-military contacts to make Taiwanese-American defense planning more robust and credible. But, in the end, Taiwan needs to do more to defend itself; given its strategic vulnerability, its defense spending ought to approach the Israeli level, 9.5 percent of GDP.

The ultimate question in deterring China is whether other Asian states will acquire nuclear arsenals of their own. Australia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan could go nuclear practically overnight. Until now they have refrained from doing so, preferring to rely on the U.S. nuclear umbrella for fear of sparking an arms race and greater regional instability. There is no urgent need to change this policy, but it would be useful to hold up regional nuclear proliferation as a threat to get China to do more to stop the North Korean nuclear program. Surely Beijing does not want to be surrounded by nuclear-armed competitors—yet that is precisely where its failure to crack down on North Korea is leading.

Beyond containment, deterrence, and economic integration lies a strategy that the British never employed against either Germany or Japan—internal subversion. Sorry, the polite euphemisms are "democracy promotion" and "human rights protection," but these amount to the same thing: The freer China becomes, the less power the Communist oligarchy will enjoy.

The United States should aim to "Taiwanize" the mainland—to spread democracy through such steps as increased radio broadcasts and Internet postings. At the moment, Beijing does an effective job of censoring free speech with the unfortunate connivance of giant American companies, which in various ways agree not to expose Chinese consumers to such "subversive" concepts as democracy and human rights. American companies even help the security services nab people who dissent from the party line. Yahoo!, for instance, recently assisted the Chinese authorities in tracking down a journalist who dared to email information about censorship to a New York-based website. He got 10 years in prison. The U.S. Commerce Department and, if necessary, Congress should pass rules that forbid U.S. firms from facilitating human rights abuses in China.

American technology should be used to crack open, not cement, the authority of the Communist party. The United States needs to step up spending for the Chinese service of the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, the National Endowment for Democracy, and other organizations that aim to penetrate the Bamboo Curtain. China does an effective job at the moment of jamming U.S. transmissions, so we need to develop technology to get around their censors. In 2004 Congress allocated $1 million for a trial grant to the Broadcasting Board of Governors for a project to circumvent Beijing's Internet controls. That work needs to be greatly expanded. As suggested by the congressionally chartered U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, we need to create an Office of Global Internet Freedom within the executive branch that would work on undermining government controls on the web not only in China but also in dictatorships from Cuba to Syria.

In general, the U.S. government should elevate the issue of human rights in our dealings with China. The State Department wrote in its most recent human rights report that the Chinese government's "human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit numerous and serious abuses." The U.S. government should do much more to publicize and denounce such abuses. We need to champion Chinese dissidents, intellectuals, and political prisoners, and help make them as famous as Andrei Sakharov, Václav Havel, and Lech Walesa. There is no point in continuing to mute our criticisms in the vain hope that, in return, China will do something tangible to help stop the North Korean nuclear program; notwithstanding the much-ballyhooed six-party deal announced in early September in Beijing, there is still no sign of Beijing's cracking down on Pyongyang.

The policies outlined here would represent a considerable change from those of the Bush administration and its immediate predecessors, which too often have kowtowed to China on security and human-rights issues while being bellicose on trade policy. A more sensible approach would be nearly the reverse. Even if this multipronged policy were fully implemented, it might not produce the desired outcome: a prosperous, parliamentary state living and trading peacefully with its neighbors. There is only so much we can do to influence Chinese behavior. But we need to at least try to head off another 1914 or 1941—or even a 1950—before it's too late. ♦

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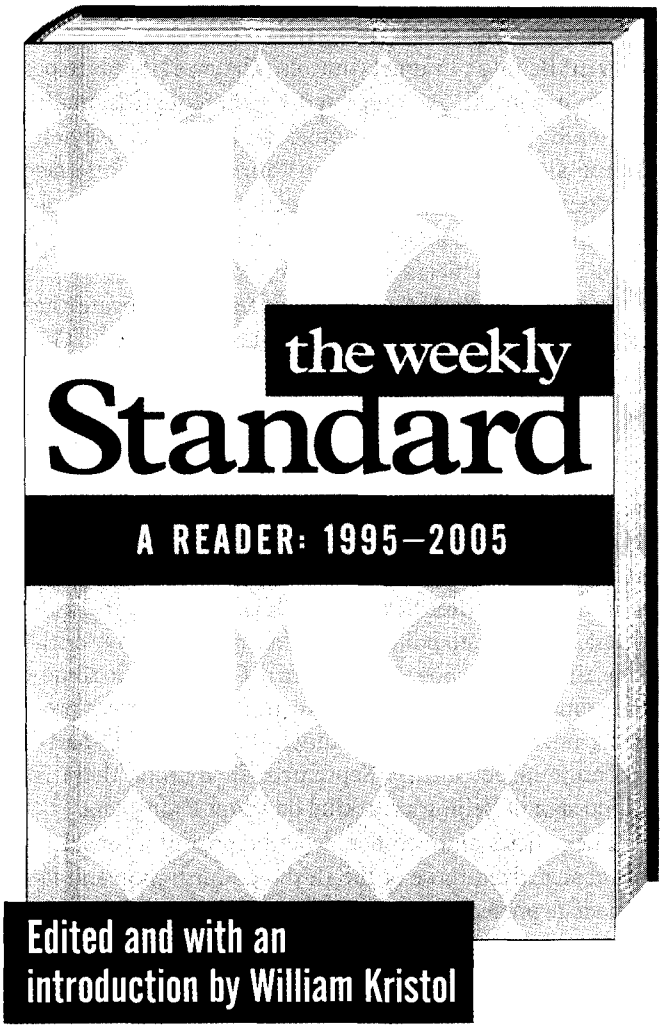

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The Ellery Queen Mystery

Why is the corpus no longer alive? By Jon L. Breen

Literary reputation is as fragile in crime fiction as anywhere else, but the precipitous decline of Ellery Queen may be unique, one of the most total, and in some ways inexplicable, cases of devalued stock in the annals of American letters. From the 1930s into the 1970s, Frederic Dannay (1905-1982) and Manfred B. Lee (1905-1971), the two cousins behind the joint pseudonym, justified the midcentury pronouncement of *New York Times* critic Anthony Boucher that "Ellery Queen *is* the American detective story." Now, in their centenary year, most of their books are out of print, and the contribution of the team is frequently understated, or even ignored, in historical accounts. Some reasons, if not good ones, can be identified for their fall. But first, the happier story of their rise.

Jon L. Breen writes about mystery fiction for The Weekly Standard.

Lee and Dannay, drawing on experience in publicity and advertising, made an ingenious marketing decision when they used the same unforgettable name for their byline and their gifted amateur sleuth. First appearing in *The Roman Hat Mystery* (1929), Ellery the character was an erudite and somewhat annoying bibliophile along the lines of Philo Vance, the creation of S.S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), whose novels were bestsellers in the 1920s. Detective novelist Ellery aided his New York police inspector father in much the same way Vance advised District Attorney Markham. In their first novel, the cousins included some of that puzzle-minded time's familiar accoutrements—a mock nonfictional preface, a floor plan of the crime scene (New York's Roman Theatre), a list of characters—and added a refinement of their own: Fifty pages from the end, they interrupt the action to present a challenge to the reader, who now has been provided the necessary clues to name the murderer "by a series of logical deductions and psychological observations."

Through the early 1930s, the team took the intellectual game that was the formal detective novel to greater heights than any American writer, arguably raising it from a craft to an art. They mined the mystery potential of specialized backgrounds—a department store in *The French Powder Mystery* (1930), a hospital in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery* (1931), a Madison Square Garden rodeo in *The American Gun Mystery* (1933)—and concealed among their characters a succession of master

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killers with god complexes who carried out seemingly inexplicable, or even impossible, murders of victims who left helpful, if initially misleading or impenetrable, dying messages. In the single year 1932, Dannay and Lee published four novels that are considered classics by proponents of formal detection: *The Greek Coffin Mystery* and *The Egyptian Cross Mystery* as Queen, *The Tragedy of X* and *The Tragedy of Y* as Barnaby Ross, the second byline they adopted for a four-book series about deaf actor/sleuth Drury Lane.

At some point in those early years, they hit on the division of labor that would continue throughout their collaboration: detailed plot outlines by Dannay would be expanded into novels, short stories, and, later, radio plays by Lee.

The partners, unlike their model Van Dine, were able to adapt to changing fashions. In the late 1930s they dropped the nationality/object title pattern and the overt challenge to the reader, and took pains to humanize Ellery, while introducing more romantic interest in an effort to crack the slick magazine serialization market.

Through their peak period of the 1940s and '50s they deepened their exploration of psychology and serious social themes in landmark novels like *Calamity Town* (1942), the first of four books set in the small New England town of Wrightsville. *Cat of Many Tails* (1949) vividly depicts the trauma to the collective psyche of Manhattanites from fear of a serial killer. *The Glass Village* (1954), a rare Queen novel without Ellery as a character, confronts xenophobic hysteria and lynch-mob justice in response to the murder of an elderly small-town artist resembling Grandma Moses. *Inspector Queen's Own Case* (1956) is a study in gerontology, in which the elder Queen detects on his own while exemplifying the adjustment problems of a new retiree. Experiments with style and theme continued through *The Finishing Stroke*, a 1958 novel looking back nostalgically to 1929, originally intended to be Ellery's final case.

Through it all, they never renounced their allegiance to the pure fair-play puzzle that was their early hallmark. While they were quite capable of creating effective sequences of action, menace, and pursuit, they knew readers relished the intellectual pleasure of those extended scenes in which Ellery explained his reasoning in careful, painstaking detail.

As the Queen novels grew in quality and prestige, the name was advancing on other fronts, including 10 fairly unremarkable B movies between 1935 and 1942, a long-running radio series between 1939 and 1948, and several TV series in the 1950s that were neither very good nor very Queenian, but helped to keep the brand name before the public. A final series (1975-76) with Jim Hutton as Ellery sought to approximate a genuine Queen style, including the challenge to the viewer. Of these media adaptations, only the radio show had the direct involvement of Dannay and Lee.

In a more significant literary event, the cousins edited the high-class pulp magazine *Mystery League*, which lasted a mere four issues during 1933-34 but foreshadowed the 1941 launch of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, still the leading crime fiction periodical 64 years later and the most prominent surviving entity to carry on the Queen name. Editorial work on the magazine, and a long series of influential anthologies, was done almost entirely by Dannay, whose separate identity as the premier editor in the field put an added strain on his relationship with Lee, which always had an element of Gilbert-and-Sullivan combativeness.

This year, the Queen centenary has been marked by a single book, *The Adventure of the Murdered Moths*, a collection of radio plays published by Crippen & Landru; a one-day symposium at Columbia, which houses Dannay's papers; and a series of commemorative issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. For all the biographies and book-length studies accorded writers like Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and even the writer the Queens emulated (in the true meaning of that abused word) earlier in their career, S.S. Van Dine, there still is no full-scale biography of the Queen team, and only one book-length critical study, Francis M. Nevins's *Royal Bloodline* (1974), now out of print. Indeed, the only in-print Queen study is *The Sound of Detection* (2002), a reference work on the radio show, by Nevins and Martin Grams Jr.

How did Ellery Queen fall so far? I'll advance five possible explanations.

First, the standard version of the genre's history has hardened into an over-simplified conventional wisdom: Classic detective fiction, the artificial kind based on clues and deductions and puzzles for the reader to solve, is British and feminine and concerned with the upper classes, thus the continued obeisance paid Christie and Sayers. Tough fiction noir, allegedly but not necessarily more realistic, is American and masculine, thus the admission into the literary canon of Hammett and Chandler. In the British classical model, the detective's activities restore order to a basically stable society, while the American hardboiled model assumes that, in a corrupt and chaotic world, there is no order to restore.

The result of this pigeonholing is that American male classicists, the greatest of whom was Ellery Queen, tend to be marginalized, not fitting the handy historical grid. Opposing points—that the Queen team wrote in a proudly American idiom, that they explored many corners of life beyond the activities of the rich and privileged, that they did more experimenting with theme, approach, and subject matter than any of their contemporaries, and that they did not always claim everything in the garden of rationality is lovely—are lost in the discussion.

Second, the distinctive Queen prose style, which some find overdecorated, may be a taste today's readers find harder to acquire, as Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor suggest in *A Catalogue of Crime*, when they refer to "the chat and comment that enliven the Queen cases for some and make them a trifle too rich for others."

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Both cousins loved the English language, strove for the perfect word to convey their meaning, and wanted to reflect their times vividly and accurately. One of their hallmarks from the beginning was the accretion of details that would capture a time, place, and mood, as in this example from an extended account of a New York heat wave in the early pages of *Cat of Many Tails*: "Some would seek the subways. The coupled cars kept their connecting doors open and when the trains rushed along between stations there was a violent displacement of the tunnel air, hellish but a wind."

In Dannay's one solo novel, *The Golden Summer* (1953), published under his birth name Daniel Nathan, he recounts what two, four, six, eight, and ten cents would buy in the small-town 1915 world of 10-year-old Danny, with a prose poem whose rhythm foreshadows the rap that leads off Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*: "When eight cents would buy a man's tie, or a whisk broom, or a white cotton-duck clothespin apron (big enough to hold 10 dozen clothespins), or a flaring open-top tin milk pail, or a fiber shoe brush with a dauber, or a leather money or tobacco pouch with a button clasp and Indian-head design."

For some readers, the Queen style remains a marvel; for others, it's a barrier.

Third, there is a general critical prejudice against literary collaboration. Two-handed fiction may be good commerce, but how can distinct creative visions combine to achieve the status of art? Both Dannay and Lee had serious literary aspirations, but their artistic visions were frequently at war. Dannay, a very good amateur poet as well as a puzzle-making genius, sought to break down artificial barriers and get the detective story taken seriously as literature. Lee, who would have pursued an academic career had he not been convinced his Jewish identity would prevent it, did not think the detective form could ever achieve the heights of great literature.

That the unlikely result of this collision of competing sensibilities was a cohesive whole is illustrated by their disagreements over the 1948 novel, *Ten Days' Wonder*, written while they were living on opposite coasts and communicating by long, often acrimonious letters. It's clear from surviving correspondence that both were unhappy with the finished product: Dannay thought his original concept had been distorted and violated by Lee's efforts, while Lee thought the elaborate puzzle was too far-fetched and psychologically implausible to render believably. Their mutual friend Anthony Boucher hated the book, whether because he shared Lee's concerns about the psychology or because (according to Dannay's theory) "it offended his deep sense of religiousness and theological purity, though he won't admit it."

Still, many commentators consider this troubled project one of the team's greatest works. Though only a genius could piece together the clues of the incredibly complex early Queen cases, an attentive and thoughtful reader might actually figure out *Ten Days' Wonder*, both Ellery's initial mistaken solution (a Queen specialty) and the final true solution.

Fourth, and possibly the biggest blot on the Queen image, is a decision of the partners, taken in the early 1960s, no doubt fiscally and commercially wise at the time but disastrous in its effect on their claim to a serious literary reputation. Apart from juvenile books and radio scripts, Dannay and Lee did not use ghostwriters or third collaborators through the end of the 1950s. But in the 1960s, the Queen byline appeared on a series of paperback original novels, edited by Lee but written by a variety of popular fiction pros. Ellery the character did not appear in them, and most did not even try to approximate a Queenian writing or plotting style. At least the difference in format helped American fans to separate the real from the ersatz, but in Britain, the wholly ghosted works appeared in hardcover from the same publisher, Victor Gollancz, as the genuine Queen novels.

Further confusing matters, several of the "real" Queen novels that appeared in hardcover in the 1960s, and actually featured Queen the sleuth, involved uncredited third collaborators. Lee, suffering from various health problems and a case of writer's block, was unable to perform his usual function of fleshing out Dannay's detailed outlines, and the job fell to Theodore Sturgeon on one book and Avram Davidson on three.

Just how damaging was this whole ghostwriting business? Once the employment of ghosts became known, its extent became blurred in the minds of readers. One of the best Queen novels, and one of the few currently in print (in the omnibus volume *The Hollywood Murders*) is *The Origin of Evil*, published in 1951 and unequivocally the sole work of Dannay and Lee. A few years ago, a friend remarked to me how impressed he was with the book, and then asked who had actually written it. His suspect was Ross Macdonald.

Are all of these explanations for the Queens' decline just an advocate's straw men? Or do the Ellery Queen team really deserve higher stature in the history of detective fiction—and American fiction generally? I believe they do. But the lack of contemporary appreciation may have more to do with their detective-puzzle style than their thematic explorations, literary aspirations, or elegant prose. Ellery Queen practiced a lost art. When I read a contemporary mystery novel that has one or two fairly-placed clues to guide the alert reader to the solution, I tend to celebrate it as a classical throwback. But nobody today is even attempting the kind of ornate puzzles the EQ team put together—and did better than anybody, even Christie and Sayers and John Dickson Carr.

One of the lessons producers William Link and Richard Levinson reportedly drew from the short-lived Queen TV series of the 1970s was that you mustn't make the puzzles too hard. They dumbed down the clues in their subsequent project, *Murder, She Wrote*, and it was a triumphant success. Thus, my fifth possible explanation: that Ellery Queen has fallen from public attention because our respect for intelligence, our cultural literacy, and our attention span are all in steep decline. ♦

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The Hunger Artist

Starvation and nuclear extortion are Kim Jong Il's weapons of choice. BY DOUG BANDOW

North Korea is different. When I visited in 1992 I found a Potemkin country, an airport without airplanes, streets without cars, and roads without street signs. Today it is a bit more open to the West, but far poorer. Alas, the so-called Democratic People's Republic of Korea is far worse than a foreign holiday gone bad, and the DPRK is different in a terribly unpleasant way. Journalist Jasper Becker, who wrote about mass famine in Maoist China, has produced a depressing but important read.

Rogue Regime
Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea
by Jasper Becker
Oxford, 300 pp., $28

Pyongyang may pose America's greatest international challenge. Becker worries that "possession of WMD could free a despot from all restraints," and believes that "the world cannot stand by and let nothing be done." But precisely what "the world" should do isn't obvious.

Becker is at his best reporting on the human cost of an artificial famine that killed as many as three million people. The winter of 1997-98 was the worst, he writes, when "people have described how they would wake up each day and immediately check with their neighbors to see who was still alive." Becker visited China's border with North Korea. Contrary to what many of us might expect, "there was no Iron Curtain of wooden guard towers, minefields, and prowling Alsatian watchdogs." None is needed, since China is complicit in the North's crimes, returning refugees, fining anyone who aids them, and rewarding snitches.

Moreover, reports Becker, Chinese officials "even allowed North Korean agents to operate freely inside China. There they carried out a campaign of murder, intimidation, and abduction both against North Koreans and those who tried to help them."

Becker was interrogated by Chinese police after interviewing desperate and starving refugees.

Becker contends that Kim Jong Il has been lucky to maintain power. After the death of his father, Kim Il Sung, in 1994, he writes, "the internal machinery of terror remained intact and he continued to deter external enemies by claiming North Korea possessed weapons of mass destruction and was ready to use them. He obtained enough foreign aid to continue food and goods distribution and maintain the loyalty of core followers."

Becker reviews claims of resistance, mutinies, assassination attempts, and planned coups d'etat, which are fascinating but impossible to verify. The lack of solid sources and corroboration may be the book's most significant flaw, though the fault is North Korea's totalitarian isolation rather than Becker's research.

The most interesting parts may be Becker's discussion of how Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il created a bizarre system of monarchical communism, with power passing within the family. No little attention was devoted to selling the Kims' beatific attributes and manifold accomplishments to the North Korean people. Explains Becker: "The brainwashing starts at two when all children are put in state nurseries" and are taught to "think, speak, and act as Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il."

When I visited 13 years ago, no room was complete without photos of both Kims. The senior Kim was everywhere pictured "giving guidance"—to doctors in the hospital, workers in the factory, and farmers in the countryside. Slogans sat above elevators, adorned buildings, stretched across streets, and even sprouted in fields.

Yet, contends Becker, despite the public image of unity, near the end of Kim Il Sung's life his son isolated the god-king, seeking to preserve his father's position and forestall détente with South Korea. Indeed, Becker alleges that Kim Jong Il may have been responsible for, or contributed to, his father's death. In any case, the many wives, concubines, children, and stepchildren provide a mix more combustible than anything found in the Ottoman Empire. The decadence of Kim Jong Il's court is exceeded only by its thuggishness.

Writes Becker: It is "profoundly wrong that no one can recall the name of a single one of his victims. There are no prisoners of conscience in North Korea. No pictures of graves or executions. No equivalent of Nelson Mandela, no Aung San Suu Kyi. No voice other than that of the ruling party's escapes from behind its impenetrable walls. Even the mere idea of internal opposition to Kim's rule is ridiculed as preposterous."

That North Korea is a tyranny is not news. But this account details a level of brutality and venality that cannot help but shock. North Korea truly is a "slave state," in Becker's words. Camp inmates are beaten and starved. Entire families are punished, often for trivial offenses. Death is the common consequence of disloyalty, incompetence, and noncompliance. No one is immune. After top-level aide Hwang Jang Yop defected, writes Becker, "rumors trickled out . . . that Kim Jong Il had ordered a purge of 2,000 people

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and former special assistant to President Reagan, is coauthor (with Ted Galen Carpenter) of The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled Relations with North and South Korea.

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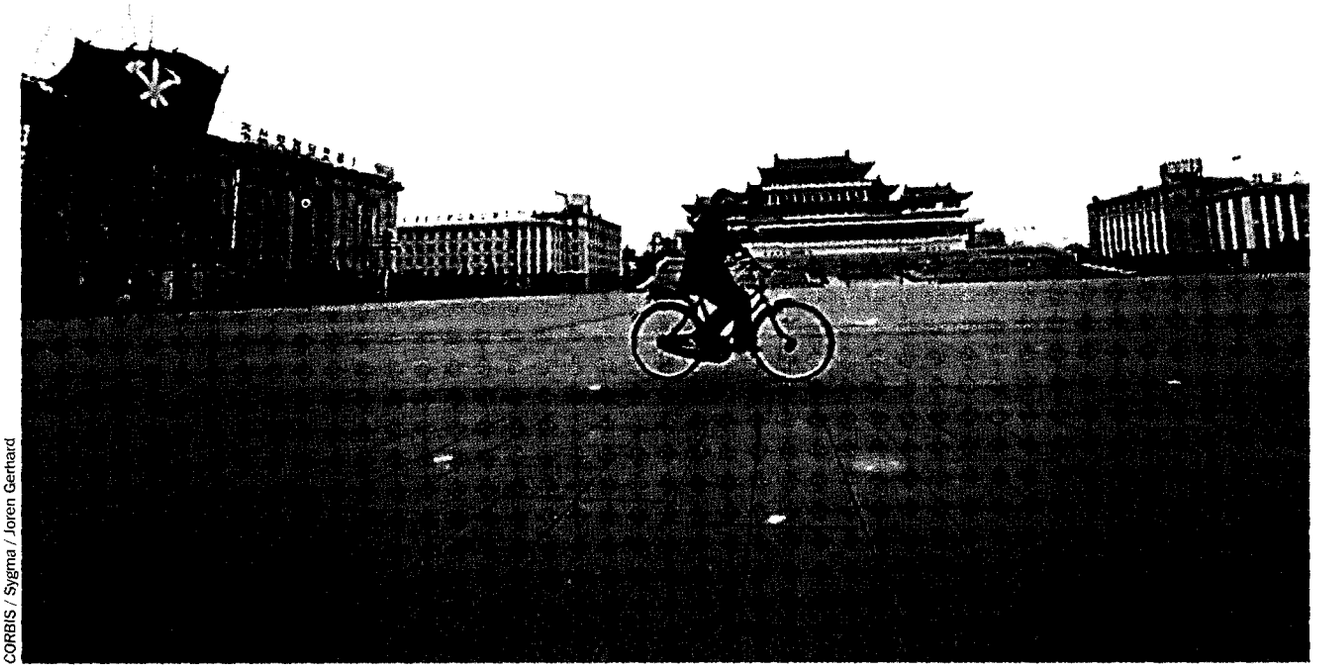

CORBIS / Sygma / Joren Gerhard

Traffic in downtown Pyongyang, 1992

connected to Hwang, including his family members. His daughter is said to have killed herself by jumping off a bridge as she was being transported to the Korean Gulag."

Many accounts of the North come from defectors, who often are unreliable, or rumors circulating among refugees, journalists, and analysts. But the thrust of the allegations is consistent, and consistently ugly.

Rogue Regime's most challenging contention may be that Kim is a barrier to reform, rather than a proponent. The conventional wisdom long has held that Kim Jong Il led a passel of technocrats in a struggle against old-line militarists. The 1994 nuclear deal and consequent influx of foreign visitors, the 2000 summit with South Korean president Kim Dae Jung, and the hesitant loosening of economic controls all support this thesis. But Becker points to brutal political repression, retreats from reform, and emphasis on ideological education as contrary evidence.

The truth is impossible to discern. The possibility that Kim Jong Il might have slowed rather than accelerated reforms started by his father undercuts the basis for Kim Dae Jung's "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with the North. Accordingly, Becker devotes a chapter to South Korean policy. There's nothing wrong with the theory behind the Sunshine Policy, Becker relates: "Kim Dae Jung's hope was that they could open up North Korea's sealed economy by offering to create an export-oriented industrial base—a transitional stage on the way to deeper social and political change."

And, for a time, the strategy appeared to work. The 2000 summit opened a new era of inter-Korean relations; North Korean relations with the United States also warmed. But many of the hopes for greater economic enterprises, and all of the hopes for political movement, went aglimmering.

On the nuclear issue, many Americans, and most South Koreans, cherish hopes for negotiated settlements, such as the one that just emerged from the six-party talks. But no realist should assume a positive, long-term outcome. Writing of Kim Jong Il, Becker contends that "it is hard to imagine that he would ever get a payoff large enough to make it worthwhile giving up his weapons of mass destruction," a source of military security and international prestige.

If he won't, then what? Becker's answer is unsatisfactory. "Foremost," he complains, "the North poses a moral question," and he finds "something abhorrent about the thought that engagement could leave Kim Jong Il and his family in power."

Sanctions are unlikely to win the support of North Korea's neighbors, and might not change North Korean policy in any case. Military strikes risk plunging the peninsula into war, leading to the destruction of Seoul, South Korea's population and industrial heart. If no military preemption, no sanctions, and no engagement, then what? Becker concludes: "With the right political will, the world could quickly agree on remedies to disarm a criminal state clearly unable to feed its own population and which tries to hold its own people as hostages and to take its neighbors hostage with nuclear weapons." But he sounds hopelessly unrealistic—exhibiting the same "willing suspension of disbelief" that he attributes to South Korean policies.

In short, we all can agree that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a criminal state, and that Kim Jong Il is loathsome. But it is far more difficult to decide what to do about his awful regime. Jasper Becker helps diagnose the problem. Unfortunately, he offers far less towards a solution. ♦

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Passion in Abstract

Robert Natkin has licked Vermeer, taken on the establishment, and won. BY DAVID GELERNTER

Robert Natkin is a past master of American painting, a national treasure in his mid-seventies who is still inventing new ways to paint while enjoying his position at the pinnacle.

He is one of the world's most distinguished artists; his story over the last half century is American art's story. Natkin is an abstract painter of epiphanies, revelations, and glimpses of heaven. While a Raphael or Titian is stuck portraying prophets or saints in the act of having visions, Natkin can paint the actual visions. Hand-crafted visions are his stock in trade. His best works are multilayered abstractions reaching back towards infinity, mysterious shapes bathed in gentle luminous mists—"all-over vibratos of light," Natkin calls them; poignantly inviting paintings you would love to step into—joyful childhood dreams temporarily granted by the artist-magician to all comers, the tiredest and most middle-aged not excluded. His best paintings arrive on the scene "trailing clouds of glory," like Wordsworth's newborn babe. He is not an abstract painter like Klee or de Kooning or Gorky or Kline or Cy Twombly, where draftsmanship is crucial. He is a painter like Matisse or Rothko or Pollack or Gerhard Richter, a colorist above all.

He is also an intensely emotional, brilliant, witty, vulgar, affectionate man who is in love with art as if he and art were teenagers in the very first throes, a young/old man in sneakers and jeans who prowls his territory in a wound-up, 19-year-old jock crouch, wisecracking and hugging people and grinning and waving his arms and telling stories and (not infrequently) weeping for a moment over something that is movingly lovely. His entire outsized personality comes out in his paintings and makes them not merely beautiful, but gripping, and often lovable, and sometimes shaking.

His painting from the early 1980s called *Ascension* is representative of the best things he has done. It's 40 inches wide by 60 tall, in acrylic paints on paper; parts have been done with brushes and parts are "suspended veils of color" (Peter Fuller's apt phrase) created with paint-soaked rags and sponges. At the center, a vivid-yellow mist stretches backwards indefinitely, towards the dawn of time or birth of the universe; it trails off at the edges into paler yellows and yellow-flavored blues, greens, and oranges. But Natkin's paintings always have structure, are never *mere* color fields or misty veils. This one has a pyramid of stacked-up squarish shapes on the lower right. On the upper left, other solid shapes (warm red and cerulean blue) break through the mist; and there is a brilliant green edge tied neatly around the whole ensemble.

Many Natkins resemble one another, yet each is distinct—because Natkin has an unlimited ability to invent new color-chords and harmonies, and his mists and mysterious shapes seem to be *created* by the underlying color-chord—the color somehow generates the form, as if the paintings were electronic computer-screen images dancing to music. For the past four years or so, I have been fascinated nearly every day by a soft yellow-green cloud and a mesmerizing sky-blue streak on a medium-sized Natkin in my home. (Soft greens and blues rarely get their proper innings in abstract painting.) The picture is roughly 40 inches wide by 30 tall, acrylics on paper; undated and untitled, but probably painted within the last decade. We own it because Natkin traded paintings with me—a typically generous gesture; otherwise, I could never have afforded one of his pieces. The cloud and the streak both take place against a soft orange mist, which seems to be whispering secrets just out of hearing.

Late last year, Natkin was the lead act in a show called "Face to Face: An exhibition of faces and portraits including recent paintings by Robert Natkin" at the David Findlay Jr., New York gallery. Those Natkins were a departure—colorful expressionist portraits vaguely suggesting Jacques Villon. No artist who exhibits at a major Manhattan gallery, and strikes out in new directions in his seventies, is doing badly. But there is more to this story than good news.

Natkin was born in 1930. He reached fruit-bearing age and made a name for himself among the color-field painters and second-wave abstract expressionists of the late 1950s and early '60s. He has been celebrated and lionized to a degree that turns ordinary painters a vivid green with envy. He has had dozens of solo exhibits. His paintings are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney, the Pompidou, the Brooklyn Museum, and many others. He is one of the gods of modern American art, and (behold!) here is the coffee-table book to prove it: *Robert Natkin* by Peter Fuller, published by Harry Abrams, nearly 12 inches wide by 11 high, reproductions of the artist's mature work *and* juvenilia included, plus interview with artist, end-paper photo of artist glaring significantly, photo of artist's beat-up brushes lying exhausted in a pan—the lot; weight one ton. (Approximate.) This is the American artist's dream. Just one small flaw: The book was published in 1941 and has long been out of print. The Art Establishment that made Natkin also betrayed him.

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Nowadays he is doing well. He has had a number of successful recent shows. But where are the retrospectives at MOMA, the Guggenheim, the Met? This is an important artist, who has proved himself over the long haul! But recall how the left, starting in the 1970s, turned viciously against liberalism and tried to claw it to death. Stalin turned against the Old Bolsheviks. The American left's leaders were no Stalins; they merely gave the Democratic party's steering wheel a hard jerk, drove off in a new direction, and invited anyone who didn't like it to get lost.

But for artists, things were more complicated—as usual. The Art Establishment is a wholly owned subsidiary of the left. When the left turned against liberalism, the Art Establishment turned against art. Natkin's work was no longer of interest. The Establishment disdained art for art's sake as much as the Soviet commissars had. The Establishment insisted that art must have a message and serve the revolution. It had no time for pure artists like Natkin, who had always been a faithful leftist, and still is. In the years when Natkin should have been climbing to the summit of American art, his career was sliding backwards.

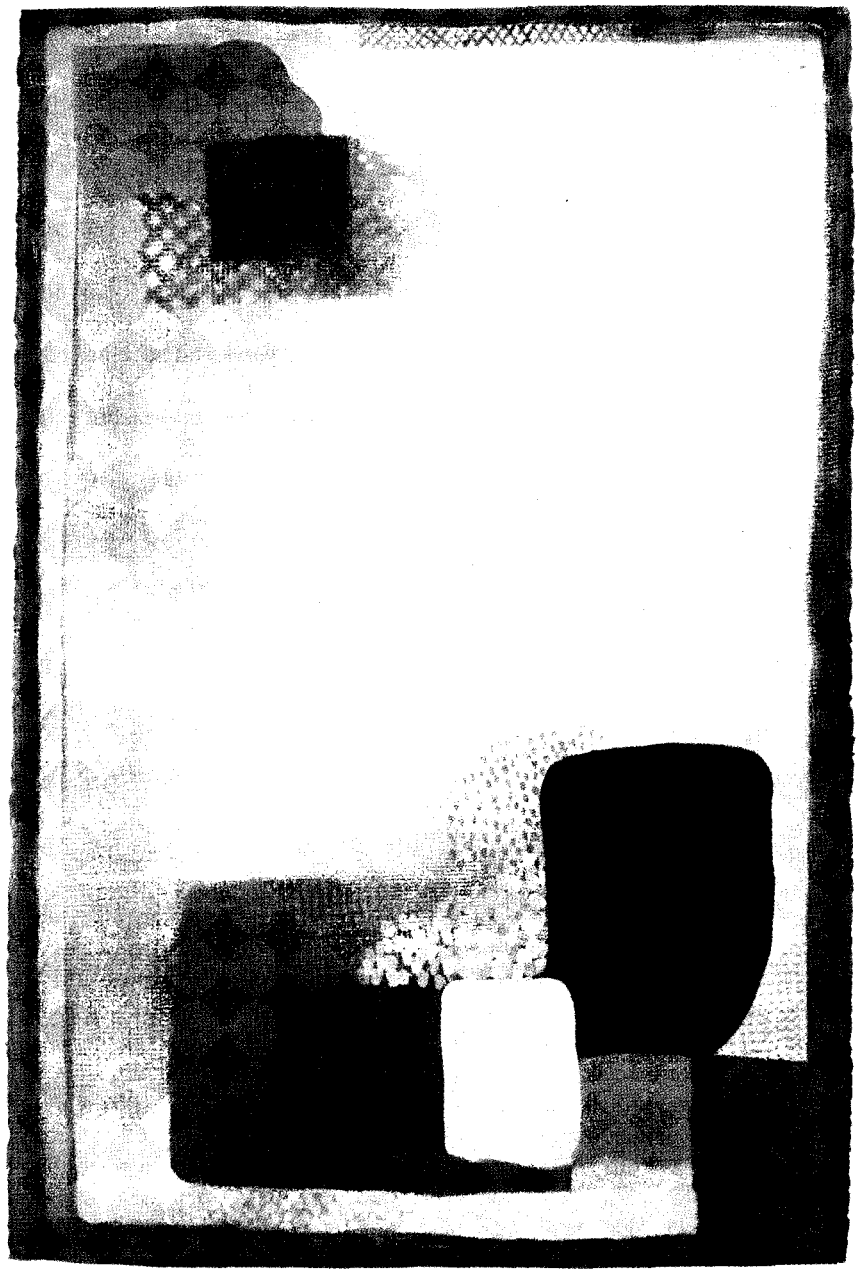
And in this case conservative Republicans offered no refuge. They were busy with politics and had no interest, by and large, in founding galleries or sponsoring artists or endowing museums. Some conservatives were worse than uninterested; they insisted that art had to be figurative and realist, or it didn't count. As if the whole 20th century, one of the most glorious in art history, had been one long mortifying mistake.

But the worst is over and Natkin has come back strong. His career is a story about how generous America can be, and how careless; and how ambivalent it remains about fine art.

The history of Natkin's childhood and the emergence and development of his art has been told before. I will only note that, although his childhood was unhappy, in many respects he had the perfect father, the perfect boyhood, and the perfect young-manhood to make an artist. He was born in Chicago; his father was a *vaudeville dancer*. Nearly all artists have fathers who are *more* respectable than the average painter. An occasional artist is the son of another artist. But what could be more *liberating* (a word I hate, but there it is) than a father who has almost *no respectability at all*? In such a case, you could do any damned thing you wanted with your life! And Natkin did.

His father hoped that his son Bobby would follow (literally) in his footsteps and become a dancer. Natkin speaks often and fondly of the dance training he received at age 15 from a quartet of black tapdancers called the Step Brothers. He did not become a dancer but he did learn something crucial, the skill that most distinguishes the talented amateur from the real thing: He learned how to put his whole self into an act of art. He is proud of having walked up to a favorite Vermeer in the Frick in 1959 and, when the guard wasn't looking, *licked it*. He reads a painting with all his senses, pours his whole self into the process, and does likewise when he *makes* a painting.

Growing up in Chicago, life was cramped, noisy, distraught, but varied, colorful, and densely packed. He might have been unhappy, but he was not bored. The 1930s were a remarkable decade for American visual cul-



Ascension, *Acrylic on paper, 60" x 40"*

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ture: The movies were exploding with glitz and glamour, cars and airplanes and airships and radio sets and comic books demanded attention, picture newsmagazines were catching on, color film and photo-publishing were coming in. For Natkin, art grows out of entertainment, and whatever else you might say about the American 1930s, they were entertaining.

As a teenager Natkin loved Paul Klee: "There was magic in Klee's color," he says, "and it was very close to theater lights." He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. During the late 1940s and early '50s he was a teenager in the process of turning into a young artist—perfect years for such a transition. He was moved by the Pollock explosion of August 1949: *Life* ran a feature story headlined "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" The answer was no; de Kooning was greater, and so was Stuart Davis—but *Life* didn't know that, and this piece was a *big* deal. In 1951, de Kooning himself won a major award in Chicago; Natkin was in the right place at the right time to be impressed. He graduated from the Art Institute in 1952; in 1959, he settled in New York, a confirmed de Kooning lover, but he was much inspired by other painters too, including such one-time big wheels as Philip Guston.

His first proto-mature paintings, in the 1950s and early '60s, are a mélange: portraits (vaguely Modigliani-like); disorganized collage-like abstractions; a gorgeous watercolor ("They are Singing in Olive Land," 1963) that remains one of the most beautiful images he has ever made. Beginning in the late '60s, he painted stripes—large canvases full of vivid verticals, suggesting either abstract picket fences (keep out!) or shower curtains (why not come in?). Natkin calls these striped pictures the "Apollo" paintings—he has given a name to each of his mature styles—and he continued to paint them for many decades. Meanwhile, he had arrived in 1968 at his mature manner, mysterious forms bathed in supernatural mist.

At first he used soft bright colors, in the "Field mouse" series. Starting in 1974, a pastel-grayish mist took over in the enchanting and seductive "Bath" paintings. In 1977, his most characteristic manner emerges in the "Bern" and "Hitchcock" series. These are the paintings where Natkin invents one lovely, striking color-chord after another; paintings you can gaze at for hours; paintings you can look at carefully day after day for years, and be refreshed and inspired every time. Natkin has continued to invent new modes, but returns repeatedly to this characteristic style that suits him perfectly.

It all goes back to a working-class Jewish home in the '30s, to the privation, cramped quarters, screaming matches, and live-in relatives, to Hebrew school memories he still resents and ponders, to the glittering silver screen and the boundless blue future. Those memories are disappearing, dissolving into the universe like a touch of watercolor in the ocean. But Natkin is an artist who figured out what he had it in him to do, and then he *did it*, with no compromises, and without caring what anyone else said or thought. He is a hero. ♦

Books 'R' Us

Signing autographs, and debating aesthetics, on the National Mall. **BY DAVID SKINNER**

The relative star power of the authors at the National Book Festival on the Mall in Washington was easily discerned from the lines of people waiting to have their books signed.

At around noon, I walked through and jotted down approximate rankings. Judith Warner, who writes books describing the persecution of economically successful, well-educated working moms who might be mistaken for big winners in today's society, had only a handful of readers awaiting her John Hancock. Andrea Mitchell of NBC, who in her memoir worries that her journalistic independence has been compromised by her socially advantageous marriage to the chairman of the Federal Reserve even as it gains her increased access to the rich and powerful, had even fewer.

Among the big winners in the autograph showdown were (lo, I am sad to report) Jonathan Safran Foer, the precious young prince of wit-lit, whose slacker signature-seekers were still only about two-thirds as numerous as the young woebegone women queued up to see Diana Gabaldon. But not even Gabaldon's historical fantasies outdrew the real thing, for the longest line belonged to David McCullough, the two-time Pulitzer-winning historian who's riding high on America's enduring and healthy fascination with its own history of great achievements and great achievers.

Getting books signed by a favorite novelist or historian or children's author may seem like a trivial activity next to that of hearing these same authors talk about their work, but about a third of the festival was reserved for book signing. Anyway, listening to the talks, one wonders if the organizers should have given over more space to book signings.

John Irving, in jeans and a green T-shirt, answered questions from *Washington Post Book World* editor Marie Arana, who led the "conversation" with far more wide-eyed wonder than really seems appropriate off the set of *Sesame Street*. Many of the working details about Irving's writing were of no more than passing interest, though one is amused by the vanity and numb-headedness of certain statements.

David Skinner is an assistant managing editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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"I can't imagine as a novelist or a screenwriter beginning with a political agenda," says Irving, whose one screenplay was for *The Cider House Rules* (based on his own novel). This movie was so pro-abortion that Planned Parenthood set up special screenings of it to remind people how terrible life (oops) was in the days before abortion was legal.

Another statement from Irving: "Until my first son was born, I had nothing to say." Irving's putative ideological opponent, Tom Wolfe, also spoke with concern about people becoming writers at too young an age to have experienced anything worthy of a book. (I don't know where Jonathan Safran Foer was at this exact moment.) Wolfe has been working this routine for over 25 years, though his case for reporting and research as the great antidote to the provincialism of the American novel certainly took a knock with his last book, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. One need only read Wolfe's adrenalized description of the bland interior of a chain-food restaurant to realize that there are some things too commonplace to report.

In his stump speech at the festival, Wolfe accused the American novelist of being Europeanized into an aesthetic of psychology and self-regard, but two of his favorite examples of great nineteenth century novelists were Zola and Balzac. Wolfe allows no room for debate on aesthetic grounds, for instance those advanced by Willa Cather in her essay "The Novel *Démeublé*," in which she calls Balzac's ambition to catalogue every last sight and sound of Paris "a stupendous ambition—but, after all, unworthy of an artist."

The same goes double for Wolfe and *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, where, again, "the property-man has been so busy on its pages." After recently reading an excellent reported novel that epitomizes the great dramatic potential of Wolfe's method—*Random Family* by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, a harrowing account of life among the drug-dealing, welfare-scamming, teenage mommies and baby-daddies of the South Bronx—I felt absolutely parched for less oppressive fiction. There is far more to be said for the blessings of imaginative art than Wolfe lets on; for one thing, it gives you something to read between Richard Price novels.

As the festival proceeded, antiwar protesters passed through carrying very unliterary signs to the march being staged a few blocks down the Mall. Possibly the most popular was a reprint of that once-ubiquitous poster proclaiming that "War is unhealthy for children and other living things." But this cloying insertion of sentimentality was not the only side-effect of the nearby protest. Because of the crowds, the sky above the mall became an aerial parking lot for low-flying helicopters. Over in the poetry pavilion, Donald Hall could barely make it through a short poem without his softly rounded consonants being crushed by the whap-whap-whapping of rotors overhead.

But Hall hung in there, prompting me to think I should definitely go buy his volume with that wonderful poem about a chair and an old man in Connecticut. Yes, there are probably many chairs and old men in the state of Connecticut, but his were special. Really. After his own excellent reading, Hall was joined by Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and a poet himself, for a celebration of the 150th anniversary of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman might be said to have labored under a rather modern, anti-Wolfian preoccupation with his own thoughts and his own body, even as he took a ravenous before-the-fact-Wolfian interest in the great, untamed and underreported life of the United States of America.

The main interest in the Whitman celebration, though, was in hearing Gioia read from "Song of Myself." But first one had to sit through a hagiographic introduction given by one of Gioia's underlings, David Kipen, the NEA's director of literature. Gioia, apparently known to his staff as The Man Who Has Changed Poetry, speaks with such good-natured deliberateness and clean enunciation he could almost be a news reader. But not a Whitman impersonator. Scholarly and civilized, the NEA chairman has nothing of the hobo, the freelance prophet, or the yeller in him.

In "Song of Myself" Whitman refers to his own verse as "barbaric yawps," a phrase Gioia read aloud with a most even, and even politic, West Coast pronunciation. ♦

A Modern Quest

How Sir Thomas Malory changed my life.

BY MEGAN BASHAM

At first glance, Arizona State University hardly seems like fertile ground for a religious awakening.

A combination of 362 days of sunshine and an influx of wealthy California transplants, results in a campus flush with perfectly tanned, waxed, and (occasionally) plastic body parts displayed in all manner of highly fashionable undress. Not for nothing was my alma mater voted *Playboy's* number-one party school in 2002. And a couple of years ago, *Maxim*, that bible of upwardly mobile miscreants—or at least those miscreants who would like to deceive single women into believing they are upwardly mobile—voted Phoenix "Best City on Earth" based almost solely on the merits of the aforementioned body parts.

But for all its party-school reputation, Arizona State is still a university.

Megan Basham is a Phillips Fellow and film critic for Townhall.com.

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And so, as much as the inhabitants of Tom Wolfe's fictitious Dupont, the majority of professors and students embrace a strange mix of liberal ethos and licentious abandon. That is, embrace the kind of environment that, at once, requires passing a feminist theory course to graduate, yet welcomes *Baywatch* to the campus mall to select, by measure of male applause, a coed for a bit part in an upcoming episode.

My degree program, English literature, was perhaps more exposed to this paradox than any other on campus. After all, engineering and physics students don't have to deconstruct the racist, misogynistic, homophobic subtext supposedly present in the work of their masters. A mathematical formula either works or it doesn't, and the prevailing beliefs held by its author at the time it was created hold no bearing over its worthiness. Not so with literature studies, in which appreciation for John Donne's subtle, metaphysical metaphors has been replaced by appreciation for Adrienne Rich's obvious, sexual ones.

On the downside, that left a lot of room for would-be intellectuals to take up class time debating homoerotic interpretations of *As You Like It* and *Richard III*. On the upside, it also left a lot of room for B.S. And since B.S. requires considerably less study time than more concrete disciplines, all but the most serious English undergrads spent the extra hours waiting in line at whatever nightclub was least likely to scrutinize IDs. Unfortunately, I could hardly count myself among "the most serious English undergrads," so to this day my understanding of *Paradise Lost* remains seriously lacking, while my grasp of how to approach a bouncer so as not to seem suspect is nearly expert.

Why "Survey of English Literature: 800 to 1750" should have been any different I can only chalk up to providence. Certainly, it wasn't the professor, Dr. Helms. Though he presented himself as the stereotypical cloistered academic, complete with wizened brow, liberal rhetoric, and mop of unkempt white hair. On closer inspection he resembled nothing if not a dirty old man. After offering his students a rote regret that most of the literature of the Middle Ages is characterized by repressive religious overtones, he would titter so continuously at the Wife of Bath's brazen innuendo (making sure no potential phallic symbol, no matter how dubious, was lost on us) that we couldn't help but wish a little of that medieval repression might find its way into ENG 221.

As far as devout texts went, his treatment of them was far less appreciative. While acknowledging their aesthetic excellence and cultural import, he usually analyzed them from the standpoint that unhealthy self-denial and recrimination are the products of any spiritual instruction of the Judeo-Christian variety. So pernicious is that legacy, he lectured, that an unnatural spirit of shame continues to plague Western civilization today.

Despite the fact that at least one-third of the class was brought up in that Judeo-Christian faith, for 98 percent of us, Helms's word was good enough. No point examining the actual texts when we could gather enough from our TA-authored review notes to satisfy any essay question. We got the gist of it—Wife of Bath: enlightened; Edmund Spenser: uptight, if brilliant, prude. And had I not uncharacteristically turned one night to an original Vulgate-cycle source for an already overdue paper on Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, I might have gone on taking academia's word for it, congratulating myself for shrugging off the yoke of Christian morality that was my sad, oppressive heritage.

My outline was simple enough: regurgitate back to Dr. Helms, in slightly longer form, his observation that Malory wisely edited out much of the religious training in *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. All I had to do was skim through the bits of holy lecture proffered by the hermits in *The Quest* and demonstrate why Malory's interpretation was far superior for having rejected them.

Only, in the end, I didn't think it was far superior. In particular, the Lancelot of *The Quest* was not the tragic, romantic figure depicted in later incarnations. Rather than Malory's notion that star-crossed love caused his (and, by extension, Arthur and Camelot's) downfall, *The Quest* suggested that common lust alone brought him low, and that nothing noble or romantic followed from it: "Growing conscious of Guinevere's glances [Lancelot] . . . set his feet in the path of lust, the path which degrades both body and soul to a degree that none can really know who has not tried it."

This Lancelot was a prideful man who dismissed his nagging conscience in favor of a chivalric sham that suited his desires better. This Lancelot—beautiful, gifted, favored with every material asset, and assured he could achieve every great thing—had been taught to honor the tenets of the Christian faith and was expected to offer God some return on his blessings. Instead, selfish pursuits dulled his interest in all but the lowest passions, causing hermit after hermit to rebuke him: "[Our Lord] gave you beauty in full measure; He gave you understanding, and wit enough to distinguish good from evil; courage He gave you . . . and over and above He gave you such good fortune that success has crowned your every undertaking . . . And you were so careless of your trust that you basely forsook Him."

As I read the hermit's condemnation of Lancelot du Lac, I felt the full weight of it on my own conscience. To be born whole-limbed and whole-minded to the American middle class could be considered an even greater cosmic jackpot. All this bounty I, and most of my classmates, used to slack through classes, waste our parents' financial investment, and generally give ourselves over to profligate behavior. The sickness of Lancelot's soul as described in the 13th century was the sickness of ours in the 21st. He had allowed the philosophy of his age to divert him from what he knew in his youth to be true: "Thus were you lost to Our Lord, who had nurtured and enhanced you and equipped you with every virtue. . . . Thus, when He thought that you would be His servant and use the riches He had loaned you in His employ, you quitted Him there and then."

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In Lancelot's excoriation, I saw the excoriation of every golden child on every university campus across America who had been raised to exemplify the Christian ethics of hard work, restraint, and reverence, but educated to spit on them.

An encounter with Christ's sacred chalice changed Lancelot's heart. An encounter with Lancelot changed mine. And though I knew that Malory would bring Lancelot back to iniquity in a continuing relationship with Queen Guinevere, *The Quest* left me assured that the round table's greatest knight was, indeed, a changed man. With a child's lack of guile, Lancelot goes from hermit to hermit, seeking instruction and praising God when he receives correction: "Ah! Gracious Lord Jesus Christ, I thank Thee and adore Thee for deigning to rebuke me for my offenses. Now I see truly that Thou dost hold me for Thy servant."

Later, he echoes St. Paul, and welcomes even death if it be in the Lord's cause: "If it be His pleasure that I die, the body's death will be the soul's salvation." Though Malory would eventually dismiss Lancelot's earnestness, I knew he could achieve lifelong victory—if for no other reason than I measured Lancelot's *Quest* experience against my own life, and found it sound.

As the author reveals in the seventh chapter, Lancelot's ascent to holiness is slow. After conversion, he continues to misunderstand the nature of his quest and attempts to defeat difficulties through his own strength, drawing his sword and prompting Heaven to pronounce, "O man of little faith and most infirm belief, why placest thou greater trust in thine own arm than in thy Maker? Thou art but a sorry wretch to hold that He who thou didst choose to serve can stand thee in no better stead than shield and sword." And even when he is rewarded for his faith with a partial vision of his heart's highest desire, he misinterprets the Grail Mass and directly disobeys his Lord's command.

Archivo Iconografico, S.A. / CORBIS

From Aubrey Beardsley's illustrated version of Le Morte d'Arthur

Rather than present some medieval religious superhero who soars to the heights of righteousness the minute he rededicates his life to God, Lancelot stumbles along in faith, just as I have. The theology of *The Quest* proves not some pious pie-in-the-sky, but a workable application of biblical principle: Fallible man will only partly triumph in this life, but consistency will win him a place at the king's table in the next.

Though he makes only gradual progress in spiritual understanding, Lancelot genuinely repents, and he receives grace to sustain his repentance. Once his eyes are opened to the things of Heaven, he finds that all around him are instructors more than willing to help him stay on the path of righteousness.

So, too, did I find that, despite my secular surroundings, heroes of faith were telling stories all around me. In a "Bible as Literature" course that sought out historical inaccuracy, I found astounding consistency that shored me up against doubt. Though instructed to sneer at Jonathan Edwards's hellfire and brimstone, I instead discovered a reasonable argument for holy fear. Rather than dreary, obsessive-compulsive confession, in Augustine I found camaraderie and reassurance that there truly is nothing new under the sun.

All said, were it not for my enlightened, liberal education, I might never have discovered a humble, childlike faith.

The towers of academia are filled with progressive ideas destined to become nothing more than feed for the next generation's educators to snuffle and shred through. But these ersatz scholars will find that time sifts all lessons, retaining only those that bear witness to truth. Regardless of the cynicism and deconstruction heaped on their wisdom, history's great teachers will continue to speak through the ages to students who have ears to hear—and, sometimes, even to those who don't. ♦

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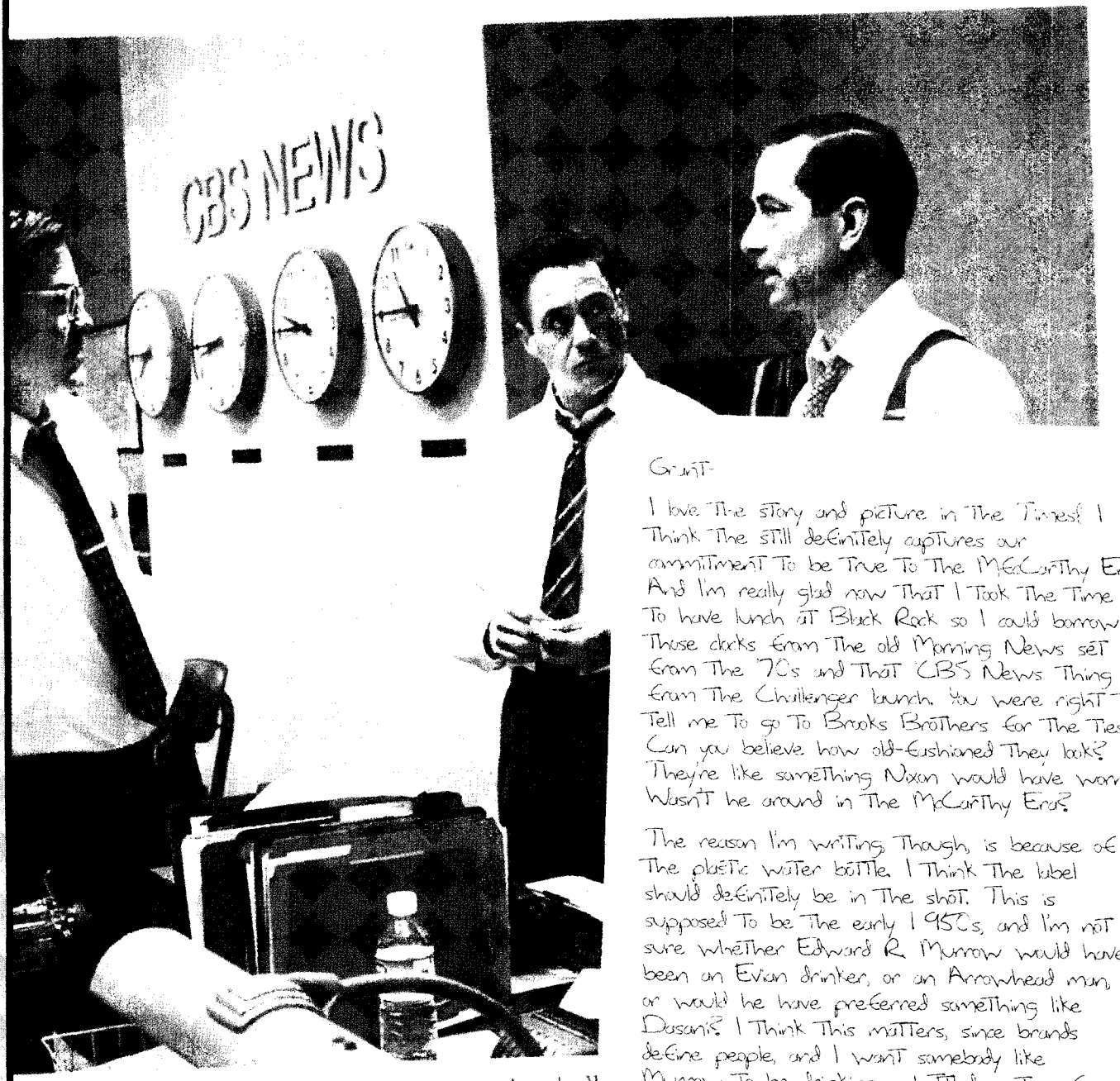
Parody

"Shot in a black-and-white palette of cigarette smoke, hair tonic, dark suits and pale button-down shirts, 'Good Night, and Good Luck' [the new Edward R. Murrow biopic, starring George Clooney as Fred Friendly] plunges into a half-forgotten world in which television was new, the cold war was at its peak, and the Surgeon General's report on the dangers of tobacco was still a decade in the future. . . . It is a meticulously detailed reconstruction of an era."

——New York Times, *September 23*

The New York Times



from left, George Clooney as Fred Friendly, Robert Downey Jr. as Joe V

Grant-

I love the story and picture in the Times! I think the still definitely captures our commitment to be true to the McCarthy Era. And I'm really glad now that I took the time to have lunch at Black Rock so I could borrow those clocks from the old Morning News set from the 70's and that CBS News thing from the Challenger launch. You were right to tell me to go to Brooks Brothers for the ties. Can you believe how old-fashioned they look? They're like something Nixon would have worn. Wasn't he around in the McCarthy Era?

The reason I'm writing, though, is because of the plastic water bottle. I think the label should definitely be in the shot. This is supposed to be the early 1950's, and I'm not sure whether Edward R. Murrow would have been an Evian drinker, or an Arrowhead man, or would he have preferred something like Dasani? I think this matters, since brands define people, and I want somebody like Murrow to be drinking a bottled water of integrity.

George

the weekly Standard

White and ...

OCTOBER 10, 2005

Good Night, and Good Luck

career — his war of words and images with Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.

While David Strathairn plays Murrow with sly elo-

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